

Edited by
BASIL DUFALLO

ROMAN ERROR

Classical Reception and the Problem of Rome's Flaws



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CLASSICAL PRESENCES

Attempts to receive the texts, images, and material culture of ancient Greece and Rome inevitably run the risk of appropriating the past in order to authenticate the present. Exploring the ways in which the classical past has been mapped over the centuries allows us to trace the avowal and disavowal of values and identities, old and new. *Classical Presences* brings the latest scholarship to bear on the contexts, theory, and practice of such use, and abuse, of the classical past.

Roman Error

*Classical Reception and the
Problem of Rome's Flaws*

EDITED BY

Basil Dufallo

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Introduction

“Roman Error,” Dangerous and Inspiring

Basil Dufallo

What draws us, time and again, to the Romans' worst failings? Why turn to them once more in a volume of collected essays? Many, of course, have decried them over the centuries. From religious intolerance to imperial domination, from corruption and immorality to an embrace of spectacular violence, from the “collapse of the republic” to the “decline and fall of the Roman Empire,” generation after generation has found much to lament, much to deplore in the Romans and their behavior. This volume by no means seeks to deny the good reasons why we have identified certain elements of Roman culture and society as unacceptable within our present worldview (nor to dismiss, say, the horrified fascination that Rome might exert at a so-called “end of the empire” moment in the modern U.S.). Yet it endeavors, nonetheless, to tell a different story about what makes Rome's most problematic features attract the attention of Rome's inheritors again and again.

In this book, we use the phrase “Roman error” in a marked sense to denote, on the one hand, a set of things the Romans did “wrong” in the judgment of posterity and, on the other hand, a variety of wayward, novel, *errant* forms of thought and representation that these flaws have inspired, receptions for whose historical importance and continued relevance this volume argues. “Roman error,” as we use it here, is both something that the Romans did and something that their heirs (including ourselves) do, when Roman faults become the basis of intense artistic and literary experimentation, rejections of prevailing ideology, revolutionary departures from received opinion, even comedy and delight, so as to reveal a close link

between reception's transgressive content ("error" as an object of reception) and its transgressive form (one that highlights reception *as* "error" in some way). While referring in some cases to things understandably viewed as distasteful or abhorrent, "Roman error," when seen like this, can nevertheless help us better explain the widespread attraction of Rome's flaws. Those who reinvent the Romans' deviance, reconceive its implications, or embrace a Roman-like errancy often meet with not only opprobrium but also approval, whether immediately or in the long history of authors, artists, philosophers, scholars, and critics that includes our contributors themselves. "Roman error," in this sense, turns out to have been both an incitement to and a means of participating in consequential debates over the best way to respond to Rome's legacy, and to have rendered us both anxious and acutely reflective about what it means to be Rome's heirs. The reception of Rome's missteps and mistakes, in other words, has historically been far more complex than simply denouncing or condemning them, simply labeling them as an *exemplum malum* to be shunned and avoided. This volume, with its play on words joining the moral, cognitive, and physical senses of the Latin verb *errare* ("to stray from the path of virtue," "to be mistaken," "to wander about," etc.), examines a particular, recurring manner in which this is so.

Some examples are perhaps in order. In 1840 the American Supreme Court took up the case of Sengbe Pieh, a young Mende slave known popularly as Joseph Cinqué, who stood accused of murder and piracy in the rebellion aboard the *Amistad*. In the previous year (as Margaret Malamud discusses in chapter 5) the abolitionist Nathaniel Jocelyn had painted an image of the African Pieh in a toga: a hero in the Roman mold. Even as it met with the praise of other abolitionists, the image provoked outrage among many, and the Artists' Fund Society of Philadelphia banned its display. Showing such an artwork, wrote one objector, was simply "contrary to usage." If slavery, to Jocelyn and those who thought like him, was a primal Roman error, here an interpretation deemed invalid, aberrant, made the African slave into a Roman freedom fighter standing up to tyranny of a kind for which Rome was also widely known. Amid deeply divisive debates in the U.S. over the question of whether Roman slavery justified its modern counterpart, Jocelyn's image turned classical reception to the purposes of political change and the eradication of a hateful institution. Yet, as Malamud explains, his painting was also subtly critical of the revolutionary generation's use of the Roman classics: "The

painting of the toga-clad black man exposed the hypocrisy of the revolutionary rhetoric of liberty in the face of the institution of slavery”; it “made clear the vast difference between chattel slavery and slavery as a metaphor for political bondage.” Rome’s reputation for tyrannical government, together with its status as a slave-owning society, thus sustained an act of resistance to slavery by pointing to false understandings of it. Jocelyn drew on “Roman error”—tyranny and slavery—in producing “Roman error”—a radical image that undermined slavery itself and appropriations of Rome that seemed blind to its true meaning.

Consider, further, *The Roman Orgy*. A silent film by this name, as Maria Wyke reveals in chapter 10, sought to appeal to its first audiences in early twentieth-century Paris through a highly ambiguous portrayal of Elagabalus, long perceived as one of the most notoriously corrupt, effeminate, and “decadent” of all Roman emperors. The impetus to produce this sumptuous visual spectacle, Wyke shows, came in part from heated debates in France over the proper role of cinema in society, and a perception that cinema contributed to French decline on the model of Rome’s. Should films seek merely to entertain or should they aim in addition at moral uplift? What was their status in comparison with the great artistic genres of the nineteenth century, the historical novel, painting, sculpture, dance, theater, and opera? Taking liberties with the scarce historical information about the exotic boy-ruler, *The Roman Orgy* evoked contemporary ideas about France’s national degeneracy and played to hopes for renewal, even as it opposed itself to charges launched at the French film industry over its supposed commercial mistakes and moral failings. Yet through the film’s lavish visual tableaux, including lions and showers of rose petals, the nascent genre of cinema “could both overcome and wallow in its own sins” as it “lingered pleasurably over the display of . . . imperial decadence.” Stories about the “Oriental” Elagabalus, with their “capacity to employ Roman perversities, a lethal orgy, and their concluding punishment” provided an engrossing visual experience, one that solicited the audience’s curiosity and drew them in by pushing the limits of what was tolerable. The myriad errors embodied by Elagabalus allowed cinema to propagate itself as an enticingly errant art form, as it “immersed its spectators back into ancient Rome with an unsettling immediacy and, at the same time, brought previous receptions of ancient Rome into the modern world.” Fast-forward a century, and modern screen arts have clearly

made reception of this kind a staple, with the violence and racy sexuality of HBO's *Rome* and *Spartacus* representing a contemporary equivalent of *The Roman Orgy's* (now, by comparison, rather innocent) techniques.

Attitudes toward tyranny, slavery, sexuality, the Eastern other, and the social role of cinema, we suggest, represent only a few of the pressing and engaging topics to which historical perspectives on Roman error can contribute fresh insight. Other essays in this volume treat subjects of similarly broad import: the failure of both Rome's democratic republic and its empire (chapters 4 and 9), civil war (chapters 2 and 8), religious transgression and "sin" (chapter 6), misguided friendship (chapters 2 and 3), narcissism (chapter 11), masochism (chapter 7), and mistaken approaches to art (chapter 1). What joins these various phenomena together, we posit, is not some intrinsic similarity between them, but rather that while they have all been constructed, at one time or another, as negatively weighted "error," they have nevertheless all generated important receptions in being errantly refigured and revalued—receptions that still matter, we argue, in diverse ways.

A briefer summary of the other essays to follow serves to illustrate both this diversity and some of the thematic continuities within it. Michel de Montaigne, as Marc Bizer shows in chapter 2, disagrees with Cicero's choice, in his *De amicitia*, to condemn the error of putting friendship before the needs of the state. Montaigne instead finds in this idea support for a view of friendship that justifies his moderation amid the political extremism of the French Wars of Religion, and this becomes a generative notion running through Montaigne's own work, "On Friendship," with its still-influential account of his bond with Étienne de La Boétie. Across a wide swath of revolutionary movements in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Joy Connolly explains in chapter 4, Cicero's era—the collapsing Roman republic—informed the strategies of radical politics, including resistant violence and the valorization of physical and affective extremes. While such approaches to political change provoked scorn from contemporaries such as Benjamin Constant and Edmund Burke, Connolly nevertheless reveals the lasting value of such critiques in expressing "core problems at the heart of liberal political thought and the political thought of modernity: how the liberal free autonomous self rules itself and relates to others, and how modern thought relates to the past." Victor Hugo's *Quatrevingt-treize*, Michèle Lowrie and Barbara Vinken argue in chapter 8, deploys the theme of

republican civil war to pit pagan and Christian Rome's shortcomings against each other, in such a way as to imply that "each corrects the insufficiencies of the other." Hugo uses this technique to argue, implicitly but forcefully, for the institution of literature as "a potent vehicle for an alternative to the political sphere." "Could such a dialectical reception of Roman antiquity," Lowrie and Vinken ask, "in fact be a 'better' way—even the 'right' way—to practice reception," insofar as it "presses upon us the responsibility to ask whether aspects of Roman antiquity rectify and redeem the erroneous aspects"? Similarly, Caroline Vout, through her own reassessment of Roman error in chapter 1, argues for Rome's supposedly flawed uses of Greek art as offering a positive model nonetheless for how visual art must be received: not by privileging logic and reason above all else, but by making a place for the irrational.

If "errant" Roman friendship informed Montaigne's ideas about true friendship in a deep and fundamental fashion, so, too, as Craig Williams underscores in chapter 3, it figures compellingly into a centuries-long debate over whether Roman *amicitia* (with its problematic links to patronage and homoeroticism) is really friendship or not. This leads Williams himself to reflect on the extent to which his readings of later readings of Roman friendship appeal to some concept of error, and what the implications of this may be for the ethics of scholarship. Sexual practices labeled deviant or perverse are likewise central to Marco Formisano's discussion of the Roman element in Sacher-Masoch's *Venus im Peltz*, the founding text of clinical discourse on masochism. Delving further than any previous critic into the novella's classical allusions, Formisano shows how the protagonists, Severin and Wanda, portray their sexual predilections as error of a distinctly Roman kind, and how this depends on reversing elements of Lucretius, Ovid, and Apuleius within a complex, highly wrought literary structure. Clinical psychology is also the focus of Richard Fletcher's analysis of Julia Kristeva's revision of Freud in chapter 11, specifically Freud's analogy of the human psyche as the archaeologically stratified city of Rome, but a Rome that can somehow absorb and contain its own history, with older buildings and monuments preserved within newer ones. The analogy, in Fletcher's interpretation, repeats the Roman error of narcissistically wishing to absorb (and so destroy) the world beyond oneself, and Kristeva corrects Freud, Fletcher contends, as she examines developments in the figure of Narcissus from Ovid to Plotinus. Fletcher concludes that psychoanalysis

thus also offers a valuable model for classical reception studies through its self-critical approach to narcissism's ambivalent pleasures and dangers.

Rome's failed ambition to encompass the world through empire, according to John Carlos Rowe in chapter 9, lies behind Henry James's implicit criticisms of Rome in *Daisy Miller* and the development of the novella's iconic title character. For Rowe, Daisy's seemingly uninformed response to the site of Rome and its monuments masks the way in which she embodies James's vision of a democratic American *imperium* in the post-Civil-War period. But the error-ridden site of Rome, for Catharine Edwards in chapter 6, predisposes characters to err and sin in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun, or the Romance of Monte Beni*, a text widely read by Protestant visitors making the pilgrimage to Rome themselves. If an emphasis on the fictionality of the Romance form reduces Rome's threat, Hawthorne's Rome, in Edwards's reading, still has much to tell us about a series of consequential issues: "Only those who confront the dark side of Rome, the novel suggests, the dark side of the human heart, indeed, can attain true creativity, maturity, and insight. Roman error, dangerous but inspiring, remains a potent force."

In its approach and various aspects of its subject matter, our volume bears a number of affinities with recent work on classical reception, on the insights of which we mean to build. Perhaps the closest of these emerges from scholarship on the reception of late antiquity and ancient Greece. In *Décadence: "Decline and Fall" or "Other Antiquity"?*, for example, Marco Formisano and Therese Fuhrer examine how "late antiquity . . . as decadence" was "profoundly influential *as such* within important strands of Western literature, art, and culture more generally" and became "good to think with" (Formisano and Fuhrer 2014, 3–4). Although the present volume pursues a more specific linkage between reception's content and form, the premise that a negative concept such as "decadence" could become a positively useful one over a wide range of receptions is clearly akin to our underlying idea. Similarly, the ways in which ideas about Greek "homosexuality," condemned as vice and error by most of nineteenth-century British society, produced a flourishing of literary and artistic adaptations of Greece in this same period, have been a productive area of classical reception studies for some time.¹ Here, too,

¹ See e.g. Dellamora 1990; Dowling 1994; Prins 1999; Evangelista 2009; Goldhill 2011, 4–5.

views of supposedly aberrant behavior (same-sex sexual relations) are seen to generate receptions valued for their rejection of received notions (in that they claim to disclose the true meaning of such behavior, in spite of social resistance) in manifold ways with fecund results rewarding close scrutiny. Moreover, like such work, our volume examines how reception can involve using an earlier era's perceived flaws productively and creatively as well as destructively and dismissively. In general, although ancient Greece has perhaps more often than Rome been thought to embody the loftiest cultural ideals (with German idealism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries forming a pinnacle of such attitudes), there has recently been a proliferation of interest in negative aspects of Greek society and their reception—especially slavery and the abusive treatment of women—similar in many respects to the features of Roman society treated here.²

There seems to be, further, a growing interest in the interaction at a given historical moment of differing value judgments about antiquity. Witness, for example, Nicholas Cole's discussion of the controversy that emerged in the early U.S. over Julius Caesar with regard to the question of whether the election of a dictator is "a legitimate democratic choice" or whether "charismatic leaders who seek to clothe themselves with a popular mandate subvert democracies and republics" (Cole 2009, 429). It emerges, too, in Elizabeth Vandiver's treatment of the conflicting classicizing allusions of World War I poets, sometimes reduced, as she points out, to a "myth" of prevailing anti-war sentiment (Vandiver 2010, 1–9). The self-conscious scholarly revaluing, moreover, of what is taken to be "erroneous" classical reception has received challenging new impetus in the influential first chapter of Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood's *Anachronic Renaissance*, with its introduction of the term "anachronic" as "an alternative to 'anachronistic,' a judgmental term that carries with it the historicist assumption that every event and every object has its proper location within objective and linear time" (Nagel and Wood 2010, 13). Even though we make no specific claim about anachronism or the anachronic per se, a willingness to put aside the negative associations

² On Greek slavery see e.g. Hall, Alston, and McConnel 2011 (specifically on its modern reception); Forsdyke 2012; Wrenhaven 2012. Recent reassessments of the treatment of women in ancient Athens include Kennedy 2014; Cohen 2015; Eidinow 2016.

of anachronism certainly figures into various aspects of what follows (as with Jocelyn's painting of Pieh and its reception).

Beyond simply telling a different story about the reception of Rome's flaws, our volume aims to make a theoretical point as well, one that we hope will also help render it of interest to many working in classical reception studies. To begin with, all reception could, in a sense, be understood as "error." Such a perspective on classical reception emerges especially from the work of Charles Martindale, above all *Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception* (Martindale 1993), still widely influential and contested nearly twenty-five years after its first publication.³ Our emphasis on reception as a profoundly open process, in which aspects of antiquity can change meaning radically (that is, a process that can "err" and "be errant," as described above), is indebted to Martindale's poststructuralist approach to the question of what reception is and how it operates. This includes his well-known dictum that meaning "*is always realized at the point of reception*," such that "we cannot get back to any originary meaning [of an ancient text or other artifact] wholly free of subsequent accretions" (Martindale 1993, 3, 7, italics his). In particular the notion of "error" as we deploy it recalls Martindale's dialogue with Harold Bloom, for whom reading itself is "misreading," whether "strong" or "weak," and who thus points to "a particular way of conceptualizing the interpretive process, namely that any interpretation, unless it is mere tautology, must be a *re*-stating, and thus necessarily *different* from whatever is interpreted" (Martindale 1993, 36, 37 citing Bloom 1973). The Derridian view of signification that Martindale deploys also furnishes a notion of reception as involving a kind of "error" through the concept of "destinerring" or *destinerrance*, a term that refers to the drifting of signs from the destination or destiny aimed at by the intentions of an author (Derrida 2007, 360). Such wandering both enables and threatens language, since the very capacity of language to function in contexts that may be radically different from one another (its "iterability") means, conversely, that no context of any utterance can ever be firmly determined or delimited. In this sense a certain "error" or "erring" is common to all

³ As indicated, for example, by the recent volume of the *Classical Receptions Journal* (5.2 [2013]) devoted to assessing the book's influence and impact. Cf. Christopher Wood's description of "Martindale's challenge" to classical reception studies in Wood 2012. See further below on Hall 2010 and Goldhill 2010.

language, all signification—and, *a fortiori*, all reception.⁴ So our volume could be said to focus on receptions of Rome's flaws that are "strong" in Martindale's Bloomian sense, insofar as they are "memorable or persuasive or effective in some way"; yet we also understand them more generally as outgrowths of the fact that textual signs always involve supplementation due to their very indeterminacy: a semantic excess that "generates further fictions, fictions which serve to answer unanswered questions, fill 'gaps', explain perceived 'contradictions', provide sequels and allow for appropriations in view of new circumstances" (Martindale 1993, 37). Our theoretical purpose, however, in using the phrase "Roman error" as we do is not to flatten out the differences between receptions, or, still less, to equate breaches of morality or ethics with the infinite wandering of signs (as though the practice of slavery and Jocelyn's depiction of Sengbe Pieh were the same thing). Rather, it is to emphasize how reception's content may relate to its form or style because of the investments of receivers in a future that will view that content differently: because of the particular social, cultural, or political *project* in which the receivers participate as they set in motion the malleability of signs. What makes *these* receptions count, for us, as "Roman error" is how they take up *this* content with such ends in view, and how they thereby attract charges of "error" or at least make us especially aware of reception as "error" in senses like those described above. The existence of ancient Roman tyranny and slavery, for example, helps motivate the image of Pieh in a Roman toga because of Jocelyn's commitment to abolitionism, which already had a hand in rejecting the idea that Roman slavery justified slavery in the modern U. S.; Elagabalus' "decadence" inspires *The Roman Orgy* because cinema was already being taken to task for making French society "immoral" in a Roman vein and cinematic directors and producers sought to counter such charges by making this art form viable and accepted (as well as profitable) in time to come; etc.

To make this point is to engage with a pair of issues that have figured centrally in recent debates over classical reception (especially, it so happens, with respect to Martindale's work): reception's relation to collective,

⁴ On the doubleness of "error" as informing poststructuralism and postmodernism more broadly, see esp. Taylor 1984. Cf. Grafton, Most, and Settis *vii* on "the endless resourcefulness and inventiveness of human error" displayed in the history of classical reception.

as opposed to individual, receivers and to the future. A full-scale account of relevant scholarship is impracticable here, but one can nevertheless point to a series of prominent studies engaging with these issues that set our own approach in relief while also providing more extensive bibliography. In “Reception Studies: Future Prospects,” James Porter surveys the exciting intellectual and pedagogical possibilities that emerge for classical reception studies from a growing realization that reception is actually inherent in the various branches and projects of classical studies as they have traditionally been understood rather than secondary to them (a realization fueled by Martindale’s insight that “reception is in a strong sense all there is”: Porter 2008, 469 citing Martindale 2007). While noting, furthermore, the usefulness of an approach such as Martindale’s for its illumination of “the subject’s constitutive role in the production of its interpretive objects” (Porter 2008, 474), Porter nevertheless remarks the need for new themes in reception studies, some of which pertain specifically to collectives, as for example “politics (including the politics of reception)” and “the (ongoing) commodification and commercialization of the past” (Porter 2008, 477). Compare a 2010 volume of *Cultural Critique* devoted to “Classical Reception and the Political.” In their introduction, Miriam Leonard and Yopie Prins outline a series of ways in which classical pasts inform contemporary thinking about the political and, in turn how “modern constructs of ‘the political’ have conditioned our receptions of the past” (Leonard and Prins 2010, 2). Among the consequences of the phenomena that they survey is a greater awareness of how reception “draws its inspiration from what the past makes possible for the future”; how it may “open the way to an alternative future, a future that has been concealed or obscured by the present, and to which the past, paradoxically, allows us access.” Indeed, “to be political,” they suggest, classical reception should orient us to the future as well as the past and the present (Leonard and Prins 2010, 5).

The collective and the future also emerge as theoretical terms in work that sets itself in explicit opposition to Martindale, as in essays by Edith Hall and Simon Goldhill in the volume, *Theorising Performance: Greek Drama, Cultural History and Critical Practice* (Hall and Harrop 2010). For Hall’s purposes, *Redeeming the Text* is too limited due to its focus on the reader (Hall 2010, 12), while the study of classical reception in drama opens an important but neglected area of reception studies in considering the reactions of collective audiences and

the access they provide to, e.g., “mass ideology, tastes and prejudices” (Hall 2010, 19). Moreover, “drama suggests a ‘virtual future’, on account of its orientation towards *what will happen next*,” which in turn “suggests the immanent power of the collective to alter [the] future” and gives rise to theater’s “‘utopian’ tendency or signature” (Hall 2010, 24–5). Goldhill’s challenge to Martindale concerns what he views as the latter’s failure to historicize, both in *Redeeming the Text* and the subsequent *Latin Poetry and the Judgment of Taste: An Essay in Aesthetics* (Martindale 2005), with its turn toward Kant and Walter Pater. Like Hall, Goldhill takes aim specifically at Martindale’s reliance on “(the) one person responding to (the) one person” through reading—Vergil to Homer, Milton to Vergil, etc. (Goldhill 2010, 60). And for Goldhill, Martindale’s effort to distinguish aesthetic from political reception fails at, among other moments, those times when Martindale imagines future receptions of the classical authors. Thus, in Martindale’s remark, “[W]ho knows? Plutarch might yet change the world again” (Martindale 2006, 11), Goldhill argues that “the focus on the so-called aesthetic character of art cannot escape the lure of the political—of changing the world, of doing something in the world, which needs a sense of history and of placement within history” (Goldhill 2010, 65).⁵

Our emphasis and phrasing of reception’s orientation toward the collective and the future in the case of “Roman error” recalls, yet differs from, those just surveyed. Such receptions, we posit, direct us along trajectories toward eventual perspectives in which aspects of hotly, collectively contested phenomena or focuses for conflict—slavery, or same-sex relations, or the place of reason in art criticism—*will have been finally*

⁵ In his reply to Hall and Goldhill in the same volume, Martindale, correspondingly, treats collectives and their implication with the future—for example, when he redefines performance to include the processes of reading and the collectives that it implies (“Author and reader are never alone” [Martindale 2010, 75]), questions the temporal duration of the historical contexts that Goldhill reconstructs for various performances (Martindale 2010, 80), and charges Goldhill, in turn, with adopting an essentializing view of Plutarch by implying “that the potential for political efficacy has to be an inherent, unchanging feature of a text” (Martindale 2010, 82). But already the notion of redemption that runs through Martindale’s *Redeeming the Text* foregrounds the implications for the future of a poststructuralist approach to reception, as especially at the book’s conclusion (cf. e.g. Martindale 1993, 106: “If . . . reading can be construed as (potentially) dialogic . . . then, perhaps, the word is not frozen, not dead, but capable of being redeemed and redeeming,” etc.).

*judged as right or wrong, once and for all determined.*⁶ Even if such a moment can never arrive (as from a poststructuralist perspective on language and signification such as Martindale's it cannot), these receptions force upon us nonetheless the *problem* of what "right" or "wrong" reception might mean, not only for individuals but also for groups of people, in each specific case. What would it mean to respond "correctly," "acceptably," "tolerably," etc. to errors in the past such as Rome's flaws? Some version of this question, whether implicit or explicit, motivates in part the remarkable receptions presented here and makes them "matter." At a moment in classical reception studies when the question of how and why certain receptions matter more than others appears to be strikingly at issue—when it sometimes seems, that is, as though case studies might be multiplied *ad libitum*—a wide-ranging study of "Roman error," we propose, has this conceptual contribution to make.⁷

There are limits, of course, to what a single volume can accomplish along these lines. Restrictions of time period and geographical region aside, it is admittedly one thing to condemn Roman slavery and another to describe the Romans, their political systems, or their cultural productions as "in error": as "corrupt," "failed," "decadent," or whatever epithet we choose. In the case of slavery, as opposed to other kinds of behaviors and practices, Joshua Cohen, for one, has argued that its intrinsic injustice, rather than any arbitrary judgments about it, is in fact what is responsible for its (general if not total) demise (Cohen 2010, 15–72). But this is not a work of ethical philosophy, and describing the ways in which

⁶ Here we remark an affinity with Duncan Kennedy's reading of Augustine in *Antiquity and the Meanings of Time* (Kennedy 2013), especially in its analysis of the double movement in the *Confessions* whereby this text both opens the narrative of Augustine's previous, errant life to new meaning(s), both for Augustine "himself" and for future readers, and displays "a strong orientation towards a desired future that for the narrating self is now an achieved state" (Kennedy 2013, 5–6). Likewise, Kennedy's emphasis on techniques of narrative closure, as in his chapters entitled "Determination" and "Self-Determination" (Kennedy 2013, 84–152), as well as his account of concepts such as "Scientific Revolution" and "modernity" as "modalities we inhabit and invest in, rather than objective descriptions of our circumstances" (Kennedy 2013, 189), suggest other areas in which this volume's concerns extend his.

⁷ Cf. e.g. Goldhill 2010, 68 on "what makes a performance significant," and the general topic of a seminar organized at the 2016 Annual Meeting of the Society for Classical Studies (San Francisco, Friday, January 8) by Rosa Andujar and Konstantinos P. Nikoloutsos entitled "Beyond the Case Study: Theorizing Classical Reception" (in which Goldhill himself was a participant).

these phenomena are similar or dissimilar, or producing a taxonomy or theory of error such as John Roberts, for one, offers in his recent book (Roberts 2011), are not among this volume's aims.⁸ Our approach focuses on value judgments *per se* rather than as they necessarily relate to intrinsic qualities of the phenomena in question. Thus our perspective allows even repugnant receptions to "matter" not only for their potential to do harm to real persons but also for the disturbing approval that they sometimes receive (e.g. from the American proponents of slavery discussed by Malamud, or the homophobic interpreters of Roman friendship described by Williams). We can offer no final word on what distinguishes a "use" from an "abuse" of the past, except to say that, although the particular terms in which societies distinguish them inevitably change, this volume suggests ways in which they often emerge dialogically due to the investments of those who seek to limit, contain, or foreclose "error." Nothing prevents today's "use" from becoming tomorrow's "abuse" and vice versa—or for this opposition to become subject to deconstruction in turn. To paraphrase Catharine Edwards in this volume, Roman error indeed remains dangerous, *if* also inspiring.

With such an interrelated set of studies an organizational scheme depending purely on topic or theme seemed out of place. The essays appear, rather, in chronological order according to date of the material that they primarily treat. But to identify, in concluding this introduction, further areas of contemporary concern that the essays address is to illustrate still better how they overlap and speak to each other. Vout and Wyke, for example, foreground the special role of the visual, whether in art or cinema, in both conveying and instigating error, as well as in provoking discussion of error's meaning and significance—a timely gesture in a society that has lived through a "visual turn." Religious conflict of a kind discussed by many of the contributors, including Bizer, Lowrie and Vinken, and Edwards, is a phenomenon sadly still with us, and one in which rejection of Roman paganism still has remarkable power to inflame violent and destructive impulses. Slavery as metaphor links Bizer's, Connolly's, and Malamud's essays, but in such a way as to remind us of the profound challenges still posed by the fact of Roman slavery, whether moral, intellectual, pedagogical, or political, for those who

⁸ Note, however, Caroline Vout's engagement with Roberts's notion of the "productiveness of the error" (Roberts 2011, 251) in her essay (chapter 1).

study and admire Roman antiquity. The role of women, the feminine, and the effeminate in the reception of Roman error connects Rowe's discussion with those of Edwards, Formisano, and Wyke, while transgressive sexuality emerges as a particular focus of Williams, Formisano, Edwards, and Rowe. Finally, the politics of specific national traditions receive scrutiny in more than one essay: France in Bizer, Williams, Lowrie and Vinken, Wyke, and Fletcher; England in Connolly and Rowe; the U.S. in Williams, Malamud, Rowe, and Edwards.

Errare Romanum est: to err is Roman.⁹

⁹ And in more than one sense: for the Latin metaphoric complex joining the physical, cognitive, and moral senses of *errare* as a distinctive feature of Roman culture, see Short 2013.

1

The Error of Roman Aesthetics

Caroline Vout

... .., ita Daedalus implet
innumeras errore vias uixque ipse reuert
ad limen potuit: tanta est fallacia tecti.

In this way, Daedalus made routes innumerable leading one astray, and was scarcely able to find his own way back to the beginning. So great is the deceptiveness of his labyrinth.

(Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8.166–8).¹

This chapter is about art history as a discipline and about the evidence we draw upon to write our relationship with the past. In this sense, it is also a chapter about reception studies more broadly. Reception studies have recognized that texts and images are not finished, but born, when they leave the study or workshop. Classical studies is not a linear trek back to a particular moment or ancient proof, but a labyrinthine route through webs of translation, “reading in,” and suggestion. Once we credit centuries of authors and artists with an active and inventive engagement with the past, erroneous responses to that past, it would seem, become impossible, or inevitable.

Yet, there is an absolute in this amorphous terrain, a dream-space or “classical ideal” that is constantly reinforced by chosen pathways (Settis

¹ I thank Jaś Elsner, Robin Osborne, and everyone at the conference, especially its organizer, Basil Dufallo, for their comments. I also thank audiences in Leiden, Boulder, Durham, York, and London. All translations are my own.

2006, 101–4). As far as art history is concerned, this space is shaped by the emergence of naturalism, a factor that makes fifth-century BCE Greek artistic production perfect, and Roman art aberrant, either in its dismal failure to replicate Greek glories or, as recent scholarship would have it, in its willful manipulation of them. In this dream-space the sanctity of the original source text lives on, as does the likelihood of making real missteps.

This chapter is not the first to highlight this tension.² Nor is it going to hit it head-on, preferring instead to bypass the accretions solidified in the nineteenth century when Winckelmann's story of Greek art's supremacy and Rome's decadence was enshrined in the academy, and to return to antiquity and the authors he studied, authors such as Pliny the Elder.³ Was Roman art always an error? In some ways, yes: it could neither compare with the Greek culture it sought to emulate nor avoid corrupting Roman *simplicitas*, turning the citizen-body into grasping individuals whose love of luxury was the downside of empire. But more surprisingly perhaps, Greek art was also always an error. These same authors credit Myron and Apelles with mistakes in the production of their artworks, and both artists and patrons with errors of judgment: any story of artistic change is a story of deviation as much as correction. But if what is at issue is naturalism, and the question of "rightness" (Halsall 2012, 11–12), how could morality not come into it?

Admitting this takes us back to Ernst Gombrich's influential theory of "making and matching," which configured naturalism as a series of adjustments by artists keen to improve on the schemata that they used to represent the world around them.⁴ This chapter strays from that in several ways: first by putting the premium on the deviation, not the correction, part of the equation; secondly by stressing less how artists see the world than how viewers of, and writers about, art see painting and statuary;⁵ and third by replacing evolution or teleology with something

² See Porter 2006 and 2008, 476.

³ Porter 2006, 39–40 and Settis 2006, esp. 28–44. The bibliography on Pliny's *Natural History* and its influence is formidable: a good starting point as far as the issues in this chapter are concerned is Barkan 1999, 65–117.

⁴ Gombrich 1959. Responses to Gombrich's theory are extensive and ongoing: see the overview of the impact of his *Art and Illusion* by Wood 2009 and, within Classics, Elsner 2006.

⁵ This shift is already there in Elsner's work above, 1997, and 2007. On Elsner's engagement with Gombrich and with other, more recent, work on naturalism, see Vout 2014.

more wandering, more haphazard—more accepting of the fact that if the Romans drew attention to the wrongness of Greek art, they were getting art criticism right. In this way, the concept of “error,” and the related verb *errare*, in its full panoply of meanings (from the wandering astray implied by “wrongness,” “mistakes,” and “errors of judgment” to more neutral meanderings or failure to find closure)⁶ serve as a productive lens for revisioning the history of art as written under Rome and calibrated in and after the Renaissance. The chapter asks that we inhabit this inheritance differently, enabling us to do more with Pliny and Plutarch’s “anecdotes” than reduce them to a list of simple achievements, and shaking the “classical ideal” utopia. It is not just poststructuralism that puts forward theories that are not subject to being constructed or assessed on the basis of evidence, or proven false by it. In its erratic relationship with nature, art too defies such straightjacketing.

Seeing Right by Seeing Wrong

It is no accident that Ur-artist Daedalus should be a homicidal genius with cunning in his name. His labyrinth is only his most explicit work to have *inextricabilis error* built into it.⁷ His entire oeuvre is transgressive and transportative, changing nature to make wood and stone move, and to have mortals mate with animals or soar heavenwards.⁸ How could it not be like this? As myth’s first *artifex*, Daedalus is the master of *mimesis*

⁶ Mention of “failure” here brings this paper into dialogue with recent work on that subject and raises the question of the difference between “failure” and “error.” I am thinking here, for example, of Feltham 2012, and works of Queer Theory such as Halberstam 2011. There are obvious overlaps, even in English: Halberstam 2011, 88 sees failure as “a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique. As a practice, failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant and that power is never total or consistent; indeed failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities,” but for all “failure’s” productiveness, there are also differences, as Halberstam’s emphasis on the silly underlines. Although this chapter deliberately eschews definition, preferring instead to cast its net widely, there is perhaps less of a sense of cessation in “error.” A moral “failing” in Latin could be *error* or *vitium*.

⁷ Verg. *Aen.* 6.27: *hic labor ille domus et inextricabilis error* (“Here is his labor, that building—the inextricable labyrinth”).

⁸ On the animacy of Daedalus’ statues, see Diod. Sic. 4.76, Aesch. *Theoroi*, frg. 78, Plat. *Meno* 97d, Arist. *De an.* 406b, and, on moving statues more broadly, Spivey 1995. When Ovid describes Daedalus fitting the fateful wings to his son, it is “so as to imitate real birds,” explicitly to challenge nature (*Met.* 8.188–9 and 195). For his involvement in Pasiphae’s madness, see Verg. *Aen.* 6.24–6, Diod. Sic. 4.77.5, and Hyg. *Fab.* 40.

with all the providence, serendipity, or arrogance that that implies; and better the last of these, however dangerous, if “skill” is to have a place. Whether he and his successors are making “art” as we know it, their creations are but “like to truth.”⁹ It is the failure to meet expectation that signals creativity.

Nor is it an accident that from antiquity already, posterity provided a corrective for Daedalus’ wandering, reducing his inextricable labyrinth to a (part-)copy of a structure he had seen in Egypt, and recasting Pasiphae’s unnatural cow contraption and Icarus’ wings as scientific experiments of a piece with an expertise in astrology.¹⁰ These explanations are not just about turning Daedalus’ flawed fable into a paradigm worthy of Rome and the Renaissance; they are about turning his arrogance into experience, about removing the randomness from *inuentio*, if not the moment of *inuentio* altogether, and making him and his natural environment coexist more comfortably. “Error” may allow for individual agency in both the production and reception of art, but it also risks robbing the art in question of its rationale, and, as we know from Plato, the question of whether art and philosophy could coexist was much debated by the ancients (Halliwell 2002). When did “art’s illusion” become too much? Certainly by the Augustan period when Vitruvius rails: “For pictures should not to be approved which are not like to truth; nor, if they are made elegant by their craftsmanship, should they be judged immediately correct because of that, unless their subjects abide by clear rules, deployed *sine offensionibus* [without ‘offences’ or failures].”¹¹

Vitruvius is as responsible as Pliny for the ways in which ancient artists, and ancient art, are understood. It is because of their distillation by Winckelmann and others that at least until poststructuralism, beauty and perfectionism remained hallmarks of artistic value, and Greece their ultimate advocate. Pliny notes that Argive sculptor Polyclitus was

⁹ *Infra*, n. 11 and Apul. *Met.* 2.4.

¹⁰ For his copying of the labyrinth, Diod. Sic. 1.61.3, 97.5, and Plin. *HN* 36.85: *sumpsisse Daedalum exemplar eius labyrinthi quem fecit in Creta non est dubium* (“There is no doubt that Daedalus had adopted it as the model for the labyrinth that he made in Crete”), and on Daedalus as a teacher of astrology, Luc. *Astrology* 14–16. For more on antiquity’s rationalization of the Icarus story, see Fowler 2013, 397.

¹¹ Vit. 7.5.4: *neque enim picturae probari debent, quae non sunt similes ueritati, nec, si factae sunt elegantes ab arte, ideo de his statim debet recte iudicari, nisi argumentationes certas rationes habuerint sine offensionibus explicatas.*

believed to have perfected (*consummare*) the science of statue-making,¹² and that earlier in the fifth century BCE painting too had been perfected (*perficere*).¹³ Small wonder that by the third century BCE, art should have stopped progressing.¹⁴ Even today, in a world that revels in indeterminacy of meaning, classical art historians are obsessed with the principles that underpin ideal practice, *termini technici* such as “balance” (*eurythmia*), “symmetry” (*symmetria*), “fittingness” (*decor*), “accuracy” (*akribeia*), and “truth” (*aletheia*).¹⁵ “Beauty” (*uenustas*) may only now be regaining momentum as a serious analytical category, but even without it, discussions of ancient art and ancient art criticism put a premium on propriety, precision, and flawlessness.¹⁶

This obsession has three major implications as far as this volume is concerned. First, it overlooks the fact that Pliny’s favorite painter, Apelles, who contributed almost more to painting than all other artists put together, and whose work was unsurpassed in its *uenustas*,¹⁷ had an odd relationship with “error.” Stories of shortcomings in his representation of nature, and his judgment, not to mention his active soliciting of criticism, were almost as common in the Roman empire as stories of his

¹² Plin. HN 34.56: *hic consummasse hanc scientiam iudicatur et toreuticen sic erudisse, ut Phidias aperuisse* (“This man is deemed to have perfected this science [i.e. of making statues] and thus to have refined the art of sculpture just as Pheidias is judged to have revealed it”).

¹³ Plin. HN 35.57: *adeoque ars perfecta erat*. Also interesting here is 35.17 which states that long before Rome’s foundation, painting had been brought to completion even in Italy, and on this passage and ancient ideas (or lack of ideas) of a particularly Roman art, de Angelis 2008.

¹⁴ Plin. HN 34.52: *deinde cessauit ars ac rursus olympiade CLVI reuixit, cum fuere longae quidem infra praedictos, probati tamen...* (“Then art stopped progressing, and it again revived in the 156th Olympiad, when there were the following artists who, admittedly far inferior to those mentioned above, were nevertheless renowned...”).

¹⁵ On the terms of Vitruvius’ architectural theory, Lefas 2010, and on technical terms in ancient art-critical contexts more broadly, Pollitt 1974. Recent attempts to think with established criteria for Roman aesthetics include, from a social historical perspective, Perry 2005, and from an anthropological perspective, Tanner 2006.

¹⁶ Summers 2010, 11: “The history of aesthetics itself must be acknowledged, even so briefly, because the Western classical tradition, seen as a culture among cultures, became identified with rule, reason, and proportion, with principles rather than with their actual realizations. To be sure, rule, reason, and proportion have been major themes and issues in Western classicism, but sole emphasis on them has cut the classical tradition off from those specific, circumstantial values that were vital to it. Classical aesthetics, in short, sort the accommodation of *noēsis* and *aisthēsis*.” For a revival of interest in beauty in art, see Eco 2004 (and, on ugliness, 2007); Danto 2003; Prettejohn 2005; and Nehamas 2007.

¹⁷ Plin. HN 35.79.

achievements, while on a different, yet related note, one of his Venus paintings was admired not for its perfection, but its antithesis (for being *imperfectus*), and, therefore, revealing of artistic process.¹⁸ We are closer to the myth of Daedalus than to Polyclitus' canon, and not far from the qualities that have defined Manet's canvases since their creation in the nineteenth century. Responding to his *Woman with a Parrot* (1866) (Figure 1.1), one of his contemporaries called it an "*ébauche* [preliminary sketch], it's true, like Watteau's *Isle of Cythera* [*Embarkation for Cythera*] in the Louvre. Watteau would have been able to push his *ébauche* to the point of perfection. Manet is still struggling with the extreme difficulty of painting, namely how to finish certain parts of the picture in order to give the ensemble its effective value."¹⁹ Manet's defectiveness speaks not to the real but to the realism of modernity. But getting it wrong does not have to be this iconoclastic. Vasari and his contemporaries were as keen on attributing Raphael with mistakes of a technical and moral nature as they are on the ideal of "art without errors." Even, if not especially in the High Renaissance, with its investment in the Greco-Roman, Raphael has to be fallible, if he is to be the new Apelles.²⁰ Beauty and ugliness are no more opposites than the avant-garde and classicism.²¹

Second, if art had stopped progressing, to revive only in the second century BCE when the Romans' expansion eastwards brought them face to face with Greek art,²² and eventually spawned a culture of collecting and canonization,²³ then the artworks of the Roman empire, under which

¹⁸ Plin. HN 35.145: *illud uero perquam rarum ac memoria dignum est, suprema opera artificum imperfectasque tabulas, sicut Irim Aristidis, Tyndaridas Nicomachi, Mediam Timomachi et quam diximus Venerem Apellis, in maiore admiratione esse quam perfecta, quippe in iis liniamenta reliqua ipsaeque cogitationes artificum spectantur...* ("It is also really weird and worth remembering that artists' last works and their unfinished pictures, such as the 'Iris' of Aristides, 'Tyndarus' Children' by Nicomachus, Timomachus' 'Medea,' and Apelles' 'Aphrodite,' which we have mentioned, are more admired than those that are complete, since in them the preliminary markings and the very thoughts of the artists are visible...").

¹⁹ As cited in Fried 1996, 303–4. Also Hadler 1977 and Dickey 2006. And on Manet's "errors" more broadly, Howard 1977.

²⁰ For Raphael's errors, see Land 2009. On Raphael's "grace" and Apelles' *uenustas* or *gratia* (Quint. *Inst.* 12.10.6), Rubin 1995, 257–402; Emison 2004, 40–58; and MacCarthy 2009.

²¹ Note here the Japanese notion of *wabi sabi* with its premium on impermanence and imperfection as the highest form of art: Juniper 2003.

²² *Supra*, n. 14.

²³ Miles 2008. When the Romans began to "collect" and form something akin to a "canon" are controversial topics: with this in mind, see Bounia 2004; Beard 2008; and Rutledge 2012.



Figure 1.1 Édouard Manet (French, Paris 1832–83), “Young Lady in 1866” [Woman with a Parrot], oil on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (www.metmuseum.org), Gift of Erwin Davis, 1889.

our authors are writing, are at best pale imitations. The flurry of work on what we once called “copies” has already addressed this problem, attacking Kopienkritik for its premise that patrons prized faithfulness above all else, and for rendering the “Doryphoroi” to survive from Italy erroneous examples of the lost masterpiece by Polyclitus. Today, we talk of “versions,” “eclecticism,” and “rivalry,” of Rome’s artists making new works based on long exposure. We also stress the intellectual basis of all of this, with Tonio Hölscher, for one, developing a semantic system to explain

how Romans deliberately deployed different inherited styles to render different subjects (e.g. Polyclitan for heroes).²⁴ Why worry that no new artistic forms were created after the classical period, when artists of the Roman period worked so cogently with what came down to them? In the words of Jeremy Tanner:

Rather than seeking to transform their inherited legacy by creating new styles or new motifs, artists rationally adapt that repertoire to a spectrum of contexts from the more functional to the more purely aesthetic, demonstrating their own capacity as agents through the rational tropes that they deployed in their contextually appropriate selection and adaptation of forms. (Tanner 2006, 279)

But does reason dispense with error? When Pliny the Younger writes to his friend Vibius Severus about the prospect of acquiring copies of two portraits, of Cornelius Nepos and Titus Catius, he puts in a plea for precise copies, acknowledging how difficult it is to make a likeness from life, never mind from another likeness, and asking that the artist not “deviate” or “wander” (*aberrare*) from the original, even to improve it.²⁵ Admittedly, the “verism” of republican portraiture makes its relationship to the real a special case. But *aberrare* is an interesting word, configuring artistic agency not as a studied selection of elements most suited to the objects’ destination but as a digression or getting lost that counts as a straying from purpose. There is more than one way to credit Rome’s largely anonymous artists with autonomy. To quote literary critic, Harold Bloom, to “live, the poet must misinterpret the father” (Bloom 1975b, 19).

Bloom brings me to my third point, that of the reader or viewer’s role in all of this: “Strong poets *must* be misread.”²⁶ Yet current consensus maintains that everything about being an elite Roman man trained him to look at Greek art without misinterpreting. While the kudos to be gained from displaying one’s *intellegerere* or (differently) *paideia* in this way is not in doubt, the notion of expertise relies on its opposite, and not only the ignorance of the freedmen who color the fabric of Petronius’

²⁴ Hölscher 1987. Also Gazda 2002, esp. 7–8; Perry 2005; and Marvin 2008.

²⁵ Plin. *Ep.* 4.28: *nam cum est arduum similitudinem effingere ex uero, tum longe difficillima est imitationis imitatio; a qua rogo ut artificem, quem elegeris ne in melius quidem sinas aberrare* (“For if it is hard to conjure a likeness from reality, then how much more difficult is a copy of a copy, which is why I ask that you do not allow the artist you choose to deviate from that, even for the better”).

²⁶ Bloom 1975a, 103. See de Bolla 1988, esp. 15–60.

Satyrica,²⁷ but on a more pervasive ignorance about how to treat Greek art—an ignorance that had even the bookish emperor Claudius cut out Alexander the Great’s face from two paintings by Apelles and put Augustus’ features in their place, and Pliny bemoan the loss of art-historical knowledge caused by the number of Greek works on display in the capital: no one knew apparently whether the Niobid group then in the Temple of Apollo Sosianus was by the fourth-century Scopas or Praxiteles.²⁸ As is to be expected, errors and uncertainties of this kind threatened Rome’s standing as world leader and moral exemplar. And Pliny’s *Natural History* is as much a book about empire as it is about the relationship of nature and culture (Carey 2003).

With these three points in mind, I want to reapproach Apelles’ “genius” and what the Romans do to Apelles and to his, and Greek, art more broadly, taking “error,” in all of its shades, seriously. Daedalus’ banishment to Crete for the murder of his nephew and artistic rival, and his production there of the cow and labyrinth, are amongst the most graphic instances of what John Roberts has called “the productiveness of the error” (Roberts 2011, 251). Art’s artfulness lies in these and in subtler demonstrations of error’s productivity. To paraphrase Roberts, error in art is, and I would argue always was, the constitutive means of sustaining praxis as truth, of renewing the possibility of truth against its positivistic enemies (Roberts 2011, 25).²⁹

Greece and the “Productiveness of the Error”

One of Pliny’s most extreme anecdotes about Greek artistic production concerns the archaic sculptor, Perillus, whose reputation rests on a bronze bull he made for Phalaris, tyrant of Acragas. The anecdote occurs in a

²⁷ Building on Bourdieu, Tanner 2006, 248–50: “The sophisticated culture of viewing marked elite status, shaped elite identity... The relationship to elite culture of... subordinate groups may take a number of forms... [S]uch individuals betray ‘the gap between acknowledgement and knowledge’ through ‘mistaken identifications and false recognitions’... Trimalchio represents the antitype of true connoisseurship,” and 258–9. Making the Petronian poet Eumolpus’ errors speak to the deceptiveness of art and decadence is Elsner 1993.

²⁸ Plin. *HN* 35.94 and 36.27–9.

²⁹ Also helpful here is Singer 1998, 9: “Error might be a salutary link between the aesthetic and rational cognition, one that might suspend the mutual exclusions otherwise predicated between them.”

section that otherwise lists sculptors as highly regarded as Cephisodotus, the elder and younger, and Micon, and is marked by its unequivocal criticism: “no one should praise Perillus”; “his works are preserved for one reason only, so that anyone who sees them, will hate his handiwork.” Perillus’ undoing was to suggest that someone be shut inside the bull and a fire lit beneath so as to produce screams of pain akin to bellowing; and his punishment, that he was the first to be imprisoned inside it. “To this point,” concludes Pliny, “had he diverted the most civilized art away from images of gods and men.”³⁰ It is only fitting that when in 146 BCE Scipio Aemilianus captured Carthage, where the bull had been since the end of the fifth century, he should have returned it to Acragas asking its citizens whether they were better off as Roman subjects or slaves of their own countrymen.³¹

Perillus’ behavior is beyond the pale: he has squandered his cultural capital by pushing the notion of art as *similis ueritati* so far as to legitimate murder—and this in the archaic period some seventy years *before* sculpture breaks free of the block to assert a more self-conscious relationship with the world around it. It is not until the mid-fifth century that Myron makes a bronze cow so lifelike that viewers suspect that it could moo, Myron an artist who seemed to “enlarge the scope of realism,” but remained unable to express “the sense of inner animation” (as opposed to the details of the body).³² He and his fellow artisans *have* to fall short or their creations would constitute hubris. But Myron is not the only one who can be compared to Perillus. What about Parrhasius of Ephesus, a painter renowned for his ability to capture facial expressions,

³⁰ Plin. HN 34.89: *Perillum nemo laudet saeuiozem Phalaride tyranno, cui taurum fecit mugitus inclusi hominis pollicitus igni subdito et primus expertus cruciatum eum iustiore saeuitia. huc a simulacris deorum hominumque deuocauerat humanissimam artem. ideo tot conditores eius laborauerant, ut ex ea tormenta fierent! itaque una de causa seruantur opera eius, ut quisquis illa uideat, oderit manus* (“No one should praise Perillus, who was crueler than the tyrant Phalaris, for whom he made a bull, promising, if a fire was placed below and a man inside, it would moo. And he was the first to test this very torture—a cruelty more just than that proposed. To this point Perillus had diverted the most civilized art away from images of gods and men. All the founders of art had worked for this—that torments should come of it! Therefore his works are preserved for one reason only—so that anyone who sees them, will hate his handiwork”). Also Ov. *Ars Am.* 1.653–4 and *Trist.* 3.11.39–54.

³¹ Cic. *Verr.* 2.4.73.

³² Plin. HN 34.58: *primus hic multiplicasse ueritatem uidetur... et ipse tamen... animi sensus non expressisse*. I owe the phrase “inner animation” to Michael Squire whose piece on Myron’s cow is crucial reading here: Squire 2010.

whose murder of an Olythian captive (tortured to provide the inspiration for his Prometheus painting) is one of the Elder Seneca's *Controversiae*?³³ Is it better to stage torture to produce art or produce art to stage torture? And where on the scale should we put Daedalus' wooden cow that enabled Pasiphae to commit bestiality and give birth to a monster? All of these stories are variations on a theme, all of them exploring the limits of representation as imitation and of the ethical responsibilities of looking. As a condition of appreciating what art-historical development might look like, "truth," as Roberts calls it, "is necessarily attached to examining and understanding how these limits...are to be defined, negated and superseded" (Roberts 2011, 208).

It makes sense, especially in a culture of viewing that prized naturalism above all else, that error should situate itself as fundamental to art's powers of self-articulation and critique (Roberts 2011, 212), and that this should extend to patronage networks more subtle and shifting than those shaped by tyranny. We have already noted Myron's main shortcoming, but his bodies too were criticized for failing to have hair and pubic hair any more flawless than on primitive works of the past.³⁴ Polyclitus' influential canon (c.450 BCE) may have taught that the perfect figure was born of a commensurability of parts (Tanner 2006, 164–70), and his successor Euphranor been praised for his studiousness and general excellence, even writing his own books about *symmetria*, but the heads and joints of Euphranor's figures are still "too big"—as are those of the painter Zeuxis who is explicitly rebuked (*reprehenditur*) as a result.³⁵ Is this an error of perception on their part, or an error of judgment by the viewer? For as Zeuxis himself boasted in a line of verse beneath one of his pictures, it would be easier to envy (*inuidere*) his work than to copy it (*imitare*).³⁶ Either way, his work was admired for its attention to detail, his painted grapes so realistic that birds attempted to peck them.³⁷ Before imagining that only creatures without human reason made this mistake, we remember that Zeuxis himself was tricked by Parrhasius into asking for a painted curtain to be drawn back from his canvas. It is by

³³ Sen. *Controv.* 10.5. See Morales 1996; Spivey 2001, 95–6; and Corbeill 2010, 79.

³⁴ Plin. *HN* 34.58.

³⁵ Plin. *HN* 35.128–9 and 35.64. Compare the praise of Lysippus in n. 41.

³⁶ Plin. *HN* 35.63.

³⁷ See also Strab. 14.2.5 on Protogenes' painting of a partridge fooling partridges and distracting from the main subject matter, and Tanner 2006, 244–6.

understanding the value of error (*intellecto errore*) that he appreciates his place in the ranking.³⁸

Apelles comes in for harsher criticism from Plutarch than that attracted by Pliny's Euphranor and Zeuxis: for one thing, he failed to render Alexander's appearance as accurately (*ἀκριβῶς*) as his rival Lysippus had done, and secondly was "rightly," to Plutarch's mind, criticized by Lysippus for giving Alexander a thunderbolt, an "inaccurate" attribute that instilled a divine status that should have been left implicit.³⁹ According to Plutarch, a just ruler did not need a Pheidias, Polyclitus, or Myron to model him but was moulded in god's image by his *ἀρετή*.⁴⁰

But did Alexander need an Apelles? For Lysippus' own fame lay in making the heads of his statues *smaller* than previous sculptors had made them, and for boasting that whereas his predecessors had made men as they really were, he made men as they seemed to be.⁴¹ There must be more to Plutarch's criticism than the issue of accuracy: even Alexander, who entrusted the painting of his portrait to no one else, was not completely convinced by Apelles' talents, failing to give one of his pictures the praise it deserved, only for his horse to expose the error of that judgment by neighing its approval.⁴² Rather, criticism is crucial in giving the painter an agency that manages a productively destabilizing relationship to power as well as to knowledge. As one of the few artist-patron relationships to be given any airtime at all by ancient authors, Apelles' work for Alexander produces an image of autocracy that is passed from the Ptolemies to Pompey to Augustus to Louis XIV. Error prevents this image from becoming banal. It keeps its charisma crackling by dint of constant questioning.

Beyond his portraits of Alexander, the most famous painting to be attributed to him, the *Calumny of Apelles*, is provoked by an error impossibly committed in the Hellenistic court.⁴³ I say "impossibly" because the story as it is first told in the second century CE by Lucian has the artist stumble a century or so forward in time to costar with Ptolemy IV of Egypt

³⁸ Plin. *HN* 35.65: ... *atque intellecto errore concederet palmam ingenuo pudore, quoniam ipse uolucres fefellisset, Parrhasius autem se artificem* ("And when he understood his error, he conceded the prize with an admirable modesty, since he had deceived birds, but Parrhasius had deceived him, an artist").

³⁹ Plut. *Alex.* 4.1–2 and *Mor.* 360d.

⁴⁰ Plut. *Mor.* 780e–f.

⁴¹ Plin. *HN* 34.65.

⁴² Ael. *VH* 2.3.

⁴³ Luc. *Cal.* And on the Renaissance tradition, Cast 1981 and Massing 1990.

in a drama in which he is falsely accused of plotting against the king. Once absolved, Apelles paints an allegory of the sorry saga, ensuring that Ptolemy's foolishness and his own slander are remembered forever in Lucian's ludic description of it. In the early Renaissance this ecphrasis enables Botticelli and rivals to revive both of their talents in the wandering translation of word into image.⁴⁴

Good artists understood that their reputation depended on getting it wrong. Both Apelles and Pheidias are supposed to have solicited censure, putting their work on show and then hiding so as to hear its faults (*uitia*) detailed.⁴⁵ But this is only part of the story: although Apelles was happy to correct the sandals of one of his figures when they were criticized by a passing shoemaker, he was less willing to listen to the shoemaker's criticisms of the figure's legs. This was not only about the shoemaker's particular expertise, it was also about understanding that there was only so far that an artist could go in improving a picture; that the biggest error of all lay in an excess of attention (*diligentia*) that meant that he did not know when to stop.⁴⁶ Take Apollodorus, a sculptor so self-critical as to have been nicknamed "mad" (*insanum*) and to have been portrayed in bronze by a fellow artist so as to look "not human, but like anger personified." He was, explains Pliny, "incapable of being satisfied in his desire (*cupiditate*) for art," *cupiditas* being a morally loaded word that we will find used of immoderate art collectors.⁴⁷ Madness is no substitute for error no matter what Vincent Van Gogh's biographies might tell us. Putting error into play enables art to "do the work of rationality, without which its ability to do anything beyond 'being' beautiful remains a dubious proposition" (Singer 1998, 9).

Shared anecdotes like that between Apelles and Pheidias turn the point about art into a point about reception more broadly. Apelles and

⁴⁴ Sandro Botticelli, *Calumny*, c.1495, Uffizi, Florence, inv. 1890, no. 1496.

⁴⁵ Apelles: Plin. 35.84–5 and Val. Max. 8.12.3; Pheidias: Luc. *Pro imag.* 14.

⁴⁶ Apelles criticizes Protogenes, an artist he otherwise admires, for not knowing when enough is enough—a memorable warning, notes Plin. *HN* 35.80, that excessive *diligentia* is often harmful. Useful here is Perry 2000.

⁴⁷ Plin. *HN* 34.81–2: Apollodorus... *factorem et ipsum, sed inter cunctos diligentissimum artis et iniquum sui iudicem, crebro perfecta signa frangentem, dum satiari cupiditate artis non quit, ideoque insanum cognominatum...* ("Apollodorus, himself a sculptor, but among all of them the most diligent in his art and a harsh critic of his work, often used to smash his finished statues, since his desire for art meant that he could not be satisfied. For this reason he was surnamed 'Madman'").

Protopogenes this time are each so despairing of their attempts to represent the foam of a panting animal that, in a fit of rage, they throw sponges at their paintings.⁴⁸ “Chance” achieves the desired effect and a “truth” that a mere paintbrush renders all too obvious; fulfillment lies in a suspension of judgment. And ancient critics argue over whether it was Apelles or Micon who incurred blame for giving horses lower eyelashes when they had none.⁴⁹ Which of our authors is right? And which of our artists wrong? The question marks underline how unstable the history of Greek art is, less a teleological process of making and matching, or trial and error even, than something so labyrinthine, with all of the *inextricabilis error* that that implies, as to make modern, even multi-directional, approaches to antiquity artless in comparison. If one wants to know what Grafton, Most, and Settis mean when they claim that the history of the reception of classical antiquity must “balance, delicately and not unproblematically, between an unwavering commitment to uncovering as far as possible the truth of both ancient and modern cultural formations on the one hand and an undogmatic appreciation of the endless resourcefulness and inventiveness of human error on the other” (Grafton, Most, and Settis 2010, vii), one could do worse than look to Pliny and his second-century CE successors.

Rome and the Error of Art Appreciation

Rome’s entire appreciation of art could be described as one big error. Take the anonymous individual who first turned gold into a commodity by wearing it on his finger—his decision was deemed the “the worst crime of human existence.”⁵⁰ Or the man who discovered how to cut marble—his was a “misguided” talent.⁵¹ By the time we get to the 70s, when Pliny is writing, these errors have escalated to such a degree that Nero has covered the stage of Pompey’s theater in gold for a day, and

⁴⁸ Dio Chrys. *Orat.* 63.4, Sext. Emp. *Pyr.* 1.28, and Plin. *NH* 35.103–4, who also implicates a third painter, Nealces.

⁴⁹ Ael. *NA* 4.50.

⁵⁰ Plin. *HN* 33.8: *pessimum uitae scelus fecit qui primus induit digitis* (“the worst crime of human existence was committed by the man who first adorned his fingers”). See Isager 1991, 56–62.

⁵¹ Plin. *HN* 36.51: *sed quisquis primus inuenit secare luxuriamque diuidere, inportuni ingenii fuit* (“But whoever first discovered how to cut marble and carve up luxury was a man with a dangerous talent”).

crammed the sitting rooms of his Golden House with the choicest pieces of Greek sculpture.⁵² His tyranny, and the need for the Flavians to distance themselves from it, may have made him the worst offender, but elsewhere, Romans reclined “amidst stained marble” (*inter maculas lapidum*), “macula” meaning a “sign of disgrace” as well as variation in color, swigging from gold and silver cups engraved with corrupting obscenity.⁵³

Pliny’s emphasis on the polluting power of Greek artistic production, and of the decline in Roman *mores* that its attractions brought with it, has been well discussed of late, as has its particular link to the influx of marble into the city. Sorchá Carey, for example, is excellent on the negative wonder embodied in the *Natural History* by foreign structures such as labyrinths (which Pliny judges “the most perversely imagined of human achievements”), and on the “mounting tension” between luxury and empire, decadence and expansion.⁵⁴ I would go further and ask what happens if we see the entire concept of “art,” as we now call it, not as miracle but miasma. Although Augustus does the decent thing and returns Myron’s statue of Apollo to Ephesus after its removal by Antony, his immediate successor Tiberius is soon snaffling Lysippus’ Apoxyomenos or “Scraper” from outside the baths of Marcus Agrippa, and Caligula trying to pull ancient Roman frescoes from the walls of a temple at Lanuvium, only for the “very essence” (*natura*) of the plaster to resist.⁵⁵

⁵² Theater: Plin. *HN* 33.54 and Dio 62.6.1–2 and Golden House: *HN* 34.84.

⁵³ Plin. *HN* 36.3 and 33.4–5: *auxere et artem uitiorum inritamenta; in poculis libidines caelare iuuat ac per obscenitates bibere* (“Provocations of vices have augmented even art: it has proved pleasing to engrave sex scenes on our cups and to drink through obscenities”).

⁵⁴ Plin. *HN* 36.84: *dicamus et labyrinthos, vel portentosissimum humani impendii opus* . . . Carey 2003, 91–9. Also Barkan 1999, 69–71; Isager 1991; and Wallace-Hadrill 1990.

⁵⁵ Antony: Plin. *HN* 34.58; Tiberius: Plin. *HN* 34.62: *plurima ex omnibus signa fecit . . . inter quae destringentem se, quem M. Agrippa ante Thermas suas dicauit, mire gratum Tiberio principi. non quiuit temperare sibi in eo, quamquam imperiosus sui inter initia principatus, transtulitque in cubiculum alio signo substituto, cum quidem tanta pop. R. contumacia fuit, ut theatri clamoribus reponi apoxyomenon flagitauerit princepsque, quamquam adamatum, reposuerit* (“He [Lysippus] made more statues than anyone . . . among which was the Scraper, which Marcus Agrippa dedicated in front of his baths and of which the emperor Tiberius was surprisingly fond. Although he was in control of himself at the start of his reign, in this case he was unable to resist and transferred it to his bedroom putting another statue in its place. But the Roman people were so opposed that they demanded with shouts in the theater that the Apoxyomenos be returned and the emperor, although he had fallen in love with it, restored it”); and Caligula: Plin. *HN* 35.18: *Gaius princeps tollere eas conatus est libidine accensus, si tectorii natura permisisset* (“Inflamed with passion, the emperor Gaius Caligula tried to lift the paintings and would have done so

The fruits of Rome's military campaigns have led to a love of painting and sculpture that has spiraled from connoisseurship to kleptomania.

More important, as far as this chapter is concerned, is the language of desire deployed in these passages, a language that puts what it means for anyone to be an art lover under the microscope. Although said to be in control of himself at the start of his rule, Tiberius is unable to resist the temptation of Lysippus' statue, which he carries back to his bedroom. When the public demands its return, he has, claims Pliny, fallen in love with it (*adamare*). So, too, Caligula who "burns with lust" (*libidine accensus*) for the temple paintings. Both have lost control of themselves: self-controlled viewers should be able to channel their enjoyment of a work of art into aesthetic, over and above sensual, pleasure. They should be able to maintain their superiority, and the artwork its decency.⁵⁶ But good art makes this hard—and not just for bad emperors, or Cicero's corrupt governor Verres, or for Encolpius or Eumolpus in Petronius' *Satyrice*. Few men had the resources to own as many statues as Nero (he is reputed to have taken 500 bronzes from Delphi alone),⁵⁷ but who is to say that they did not dream of doing so? Even the orator Lucius Licinius Crassus, whom Cicero, his pupil, praised for his *grauitas*, spent some 100,000 sesterces on two cups by the eminently collectable Greek metalworker Mentor, only, according to Pliny, to have too much "shame" (*uerecundia*) to use them.⁵⁸

How could a Roman art enthusiast get it right? Not only did devotion to art threaten his standing as a *uir bonus*, but it also damaged the object concerned forever, changing Myron's Apollo from cult statue and god to plunder or plaything. Ann Vasaly has highlighted how the language that Cicero uses of Verres' theft of images of women and goddesses implies a violent assault on their virginity—not something that can be restored, even if they were returned to their sanctuaries (Vasaly 1993, 120–4). And Pliny tells how Nero's decision to gild a statue of the young Alexander by Lysippus scarred it forever.⁵⁹ Before we are too critical of Nero's

if the nature of the plaster had permitted"). Compare the reluctance of the cult statue in Cic. Verr. 2.4.94–5.

⁵⁶ On this Roman discourse of the love of art, see Tanner 2006, 255–61.

⁵⁷ Paus. 10.7.1. ⁵⁸ Plin. HN 33.147.

⁵⁹ Plin. HN 34.63: ...*quam statuam inaurari iussit Nero princeps delectatus admodum illa; dein, cum pretio perisset gratia artis, detractum est aurum, pretiosiorque talis existimabatur etiam cicatricibus*... ("And the emperor Nero was so delighted by this statue that he

actions, we remember Claudius defacing Apelles' paintings, and note that Alexander himself, although he had a lot to say about painting, was so ignorant as to make the boys who mixed the paint for Apelles snigger.⁶⁰ We also note that Lysippus' statue was thought more valuable with its scars, and the Venus Anadyomene painting, then in the temple of Divus Julius, a better testimony of Apelles' talent in its damaged state than in its pristine condition. Originally, it was painting and god; now, in a new context, with its "mistreatment" (*iniuria*) on show, it could also count as heritage.⁶¹

That none of the artists working under the Roman empire were up to the task of repairing Apelles' painting serves only to increase his greatness. Yet they could, of course, copy when they wanted to—Pliny's letter to Severus and the discovery of a workshop of casts of Greek sculpture at Baiae on the Bay of Naples attest to that, as does the fact that the market was awash with fakes. Artists were said to achieve a higher price for their work if they inscribed their marble with the name of Praxiteles, their silver "Myron," and their paintings "Zeuxis,"⁶² and buyers were encouraged to sniff Corinthian bronze to determine whether it was genuine.⁶³ The possibility of being conned, and Greek cultural production corrupted in the process, was real, and made the demand for expertise and for a revised history of art, which corrected the inexactitude of earlier Greek writers, a natural history even for a new imperial world, more urgent.⁶⁴ One could go as far as to say that "Greek art" as we know it was born of error and of the need to bring control to a burgeoning, ever exploratory relationship.⁶⁵ Not that this negotiation was ever completed:

ordered it to be gilded. But the grace of its art was so damaged by this addition to its monetary value that the gold was removed, and it was deemed more valuable even with its scars") and Vout 2017.

⁶⁰ Plin. *HN* 35.85–6.

⁶¹ Plin. *HN* 35.91: *cuius inferiorem partem corruptam qui reficeret non potuit reperiri, uerum ipsa iniuria cessit in gloriam artificis* ("No one could be found who might restore the lower damaged part of the picture but the very injury contributed to the glory of the artist").

⁶² Phaedrus 5.1.

⁶³ Corinthian bronze was produced "by accident" when Corinth was captured and burned and was so prized that Antony reputedly proscribed Verres and Cicero just to get his hands on their examples (Plin. *HN* 34.6–7). See also Augustus at Suet. *Aug.* 70.2, Isager 1991, 80–91, and Jacobson and Weitzman 1992.

⁶⁴ See e.g. Plin. *HN* 35.54 and, related to this, 37.31–3.

⁶⁵ This raises the question of Pliny's sources, authors such as the sculptor Xenocrates who were already writing about Greek material culture in the Hellenistic period, though these "treatises" are unlikely to have the moral dimension of Pliny.

as Pliny states in his preface, he would like his project understood in the way that Apelles' or Polyclitus' work is understood when they signed it in the imperfect tense (e.g. *Apelles faciebat aut Polyclitus*)—in other words, as ongoing, “as though art was always inchoate and imperfect”—so that if ever faced with the corrigenda he would later face, it could be claimed that he would have corrected them, had he reached the finish line.⁶⁶

Not that all artists working under Rome were content to skulk in Apelles' or Polyclitus' shadows. The orator Quintilian was the first to admit that *imitatio* for its own sake was not enough, that not all predecessors were as worthy of emulation as others, and that the genre of what one was aiming to produce was critical (you would not, for example, evoke Polyclitan style if you were making a statue of a god).⁶⁷ We are back to the scholarship on “copies” or, as we now call them, “versions,” and the way in which “Far from being symptomatic of creative failure, then, eclecticism provided the artist with a strategy for balancing the familiar with the innovative, with the intended result a work of art uniquely suited to a specific social, cultural, or physical context” (Perry 2005, 149). In the same way that *mimesis* does not clone nature, an artist's creativity is awakened, not stifled, by studying earlier practitioners.

Little room for error here. But if this is so, then an artist's training in the workshop was akin to an elite rhetorical training and he, like his viewing public, was adept at using an established lingua franca. We have to trust in Perry's “familiar,” “intended,” “uniquely suited,” and in the Vitruvian concept of *decor*. Yet when we see this decorum applied to statuary, as in Cicero's letters to Atticus, it is less about the value of individual pieces than about creating an ensemble that conjures up an atmosphere fitting for the space in question, and this sense of fit was less intellectual than it was emotional⁶⁸ (not about creating an authentic Greek gymnasium but the *sense* of a Greek gymnasium, a modern “take”). How else does one explain the presence of the Pan and Goat sculpture in the garden of the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum?⁶⁹ Why assume that the art appreciation of anyone, especially Cicero, who self-confessedly loves art more than is sensible,⁷⁰ is so dispassionate? Why strip Greek art of its enigma by chopping its bodies into choice cuts? One

⁶⁶ Plin. *HN* pref. 26.

⁶⁷ Quint. *Inst.* 10.2 and 12.10.7–8.

⁶⁸ Here I follow Mayer 2012, 187–91. See also Marvin 1989 and 2008, 235–8.

⁶⁹ National Archaeological Museum, Naples, inv. 27709.

⁷⁰ Cic. *Att.* 1.8.



Figure 1.2 The “Canopus”. Hadrian’s Villa at Tivoli.

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of Lucian’s protagonists might do this to great Greek statues so as to describe the perfect woman (selecting only the head of Praxiteles’ Cnidian Aphrodite, and rejecting the nude torso in favour of one by Calamis),⁷¹ but readers of the *Natural History* will know that Praxiteles was supposed to have made a charioteer for one of Calamis’ chariot groups for fear that this same sculptor might otherwise be judged to have “failed” in his human figure.⁷²

With these concessions in mind, let us turn to a concrete example, and briefly re-examine how we get from the fifth century BCE and the six maidens or “caryatids” of the south porch of the Erechtheion on the Athenian Acropolis to the four full-size Pentelic marble replicas of these erected in the 130s CE around the “Canopus” of Hadrian’s Villa at Tivoli (Figure 1.2).⁷³ Hadrian’s designers have drawn attention to the replication

⁷¹ Luc. *Imag.* 6. ⁷² Plin. *HN* 34.71.

⁷³ See e.g. Perry 2005, 91. On the date of these sculptures, and their possible reuse at Tivoli after earlier display in Augustan and Flavian Rome, see Broucke 1999, and on their material, Pensabene et al. 2012, 1335.

that their efforts stand for by copying two of the maidens from the Erechtheion, twice over, and positioning them by a pool so as to create further reflections.⁷⁴ Deprived of their view towards the Parthenon, they stare instead across a canal inhabited by a marble Scylla. Statues of gods, and figures from myth and history, look on (two of them versions of Amazon types created by Pheidias and Cresilas for the temple of Artemis at Ephesus), more than one (e.g. a crocodile and personification of the Nile) with connections to Egypt.⁷⁵

Flanking the four maidens on either side, and giving them a new frame of reference, are two squat silenoi, reversed replicas of one another (Raeder 1983, cat. nos. 81–2). Does their presence recast the *korai* as maenads and their shallow offering bowls as tambourines? Certainly silenoi and maenads coexist elsewhere in the Mediterranean world as figured supports in architectural entablature.⁷⁶ This allusion gives the Erechtheion's maidens a different charge more suitable perhaps for an outdoor dining setting. Yet "suitability" or "appropriateness" is too tame a gloss given the mixed messages of the space and the Villa more broadly—less eclecticism than exoticism of a kind that muddles the world of Homeric heroes with the age of Pericles, with the principate (when caryatids graced Augustus' forum and Agrippa's Pantheon),⁷⁷ with Egypt, to the point of invalidation. All of it was the Roman empire but an empire that was still even (if not especially) then in the Second Sophistic with a Hellenic emperor in control, offering up its appropriation of Greek art as a challenge as much as a statement. We can call this *paideia* if we want to,⁷⁸ but loosening the maidens of the baggage that has them function as standard-bearers of Athenian, and Augustan, culture and releasing them into the wild with other Dionysiac sculpture, raises

⁷⁴ Aurigemma 1961, figs. 95–9 and 103–6 and Raeder 1983, cat. nos. 76–9. No two of the Erechtheion "caryatids" are identical: see Lauter 1976.

⁷⁵ MacDonald and Pinto 1995, 141–3. Recent excavations at the Villa and the discovery of *Aegyptiaca* in the region of the "Palaestra" and especially in the "Antinoeion" (Mari 2007) must make us rethink the link between other Egyptian sculpture and the "Canopus" complex.

⁷⁶ See e.g. the caryatids and telamones, usually identified as maenads and satyrs, from the first phase of the theater at Monte Iato in western Sicily at the end of the fourth century BCE: Ridgway 1990, 176–8 and King 1998.

⁷⁷ For the caryatids of the Agrippan Pantheon, see Plin. *HN* 36.38 and Broucke 1999.

⁷⁸ For a discussion of the scholarly tendency to see Roman versions of the Erechtheion's maidens as references to the glory of classical Athens, see Lesk 2007, 38. Also now Neudecker 2015, 134.

questions about whether Hadrian's Hellenism is as respectful or rational as we thought; whether it is not closer to Antony's overindulgence in wine, women, and the Orient, or to Tiberius' fetishization of the Apoxyomenos. Visitors are encouraged to wander and misconstrue these icons. Impertinence is reverence's flip side.

Paradigm Shift

In all of these cases—production and viewing, reuse and writing—“error” has been a useful guide for rethinking what the Romans were doing in making sense of sculpture and painting. Without error, the story of Greek art is a story composed since the Renaissance, when authors looked for positive paradigms through which to live their own engagement with the past. That story is a story that rolls Pliny's anxiety about *luxuria* into a Gibbonian comment about Roman decadence. More than this, though, it forgets that Greek art was not always perfect; it elevates Polyclitus' canon and its call for *τὸ κάλλος* from the status of single chapter to overarching summary to dream-space. In contrast, this chapter has shown how complex the ancient story is, and how an emphasis on the less polished aspects of making and reception, and on process rather than conclusion, demands that we see issues such as naturalism, patronage, agency, and appropriation differently. Looked at like this, everyone's engagement with the world around them (that of Apelles, Pliny, Hadrian) is more nuanced—not just a skeleton of critical terms but a living, breathing body of material. This has at least two important implications: first, it accepts that the possibility of error relies on perfection, even if, as it accepts the fundamental nature of error, it risks dissolving “error,” in its strongest sense, as a category.⁷⁹ Secondly, in the struggle to reconcile thought and perception, it understands that, ultimately, art appreciation has no rational basis.

Realizing this will, I hope, make the ignorant Trimalchio and the violent Verres less aberrant, Vasari and Winckelmann less normative, and our future reappraisals more adventurous, giving us alternative routes to those of Burke and Kant. Why privilege reason? “Error” makes the Roman reception of Greek art the paradigm for how art

⁷⁹ Helpful in articulating this was the review of Roberts by Schwabsky 2013.

must be received. Just as the artist can never get it right, nor can the viewer of art get it right, for getting it right is not what art does or enables. The inherently allusive quality of art always invites its viewers to see more, but seeing more is always excessive. The temptation to *luxuria* is inevitable because art as great as Apelles' art or the Erechtheion maidens makes it seem possible to live in another world—and the thing about other worlds is that their values are different. There, the most lavish, beautiful, accurate image is but the baseline from which more lavish, beautiful, or accurate images can be crafted.

2

Whose Mistake? The Errors of Friendship in Cicero, La Boétie, and Montaigne

Marc Bizer

The story has been told countless times, and first by Montaigne himself: both counselors at the Bordeaux parliament, Michel Eyquem de Montaigne and Étienne de La Boétie, had known each other by reputation before meeting by chance in the 1550s. They became close friends, and before dying in 1563 at the age of 32, La Boétie left his library and papers to Montaigne. Most famously, in a letter to his father written after the friend's death, Montaigne recounted the agonizing man's final words: "My brother, my brother, do *you* refuse me a place?"¹ The meaning of "a place" has often been discussed, yet it seems plausible that the question concerned La Boétie's place in posterity: seven years later, Montaigne would publish La Boétie's works, to which he appended the letter as a sort of postface. Some critics have observed that Montaigne would spend the rest of his life defining La Boétie's place—and his own with respect to La Boétie.²

Indeed, when Montaigne published the first edition of his *Essays* in 1580, he paid homage to his departed friend in an essay entitled "On

¹ All English translations of the *Essays* come from the Donald Frame rendition.

² As Stephen Greenblatt aptly observed, "In the almost thirty years that followed, until his own death in 1592, his life was strangely haunted by his responsibility for the posthumous 'place' of Étienne de La Boétie" (Greenblatt 1989, 224). See also François Rigolot's fundamental article, "Montaigne's Purloined Letters," where he refers to Montaigne's letter to his father as "Montaigne's birth certificate as a man of letters" (1983).

Friendship,” to which he decided to add the work of his friend Étienne de La Boétie, *On Voluntary Servitude*, a work devoted to a critique of tyranny—or actually, of any political system in which people voluntarily accept servitude under one man—and to explaining how people come unwittingly to accept it. La Boétie, it turns out, had cause to fear dislocation for many reasons. First and foremost, the French Wars of Religion would threaten the place of La Boétie’s treatise in the *Essays*: because of its fundamentally anti-tyrannical argument, *On Voluntary Servitude* had been published by Huguenots along with other texts critical of the French monarchy in 1574 and 1576. Montaigne, a moderate Catholic, sought to distance himself from the Huguenot cause and removed his friend’s work, substituting La Boétie’s love sonnets for the 1580 and 1588 editions of his *Essays*, from which any trace of the friend’s works would later disappear for good. Yet despite the physical disappearance of *On Voluntary Servitude*, scholars agree that its influence on Montaigne’s *Essays* in general, and the essay “On Friendship” in particular, is profound.³ By engaging with La Boétie and French history, Montaigne also engages with Cicero’s *De amicitia*—and beyond it, ancient thought on friendship more broadly. While the friend’s work may have been removed from the middle of the first book of Montaigne’s *Essays*, a near-translation of a key passage of the *De amicitia* appears at near-midpoint of “On Friendship.”

As this brief overview may already suggest, it will be my purpose to show how deep the notion of error runs in “On Friendship” as a text that displays a multilayered and sometimes conflicted reception of Roman antiquity. At its core, Montaigne’s essay is concerned with the reception of the “Roman error” of putting friendship before the interests of the state, as enshrined in the story of Gaius Blossius’s excessive devotion to his friend Tiberius Gracchus, itself inscribed in the bloody history of Roman civil conflict. As we will see, Montaigne, in effect, disagrees with Cicero over how to react to this error, with Cicero (through his Laelius) opting to condemn it and Montaigne finding in it support for his view of

³ Marc Schachter notes, “...the *Essais* contains and reworks central elements of La Boétie’s *Servitude volontaire*, although the treatise is not reproduced there” (Schachter 2008, 103). See George Hoffmann’s essay on the reality of Montaigne’s friendship with La Boétie, where he states, “It would be hard...to underestimate the influence La Boétie’s work exerted on Montaigne’s literary career” (Hoffmann 2015, 37).

friendship, a view of friendship that in turn sustains Montaigne's moderation amid political extremism during the French Wars of Religion. Finally, this position allows Montaigne to distract his readers from the "error" of wanting to publish a friend's text which could so easily be used to justify tyrannicide, and even to upbraid those who saw La Boétie's treatise as seditious. Such are the complex means by which Montaigne both engages with and seeks closure to "Roman error," in the terms laid out by the introduction to this volume.

Montaigne illustrates the relationship between his essays and La Boétie's treatise at the outset of the essay through the example of a painter whom he commissioned to decorate the walls of his tower by surrounding a picture with grotesque figures:

As I was considering the way a painter I employ went about his work, I had a mind to imitate him. He chooses the best spot, the middle of each wall, to put a picture labored over with all his skill, and the empty space all around it he fills with grotesques, which are fantastic paintings whose only charm lies in their variety and strangeness. And what are these things of mine, in truth, but grotesques and monstrous bodies, pieced together of diverse members, without definite shape, having no order, sequence or proportion other than accidental?

A lovely woman tapers off into a fish.

I do indeed go along with my painter in this second point, but I fall short in the first and better part; for my ability does not go far enough for me to dare to undertake a rich, polished picture, formed according to art. It occurred to me to borrow one from Étienne de La Boétie, which will do honor to all the rest of this work. It is a discourse to which he gave the name *La Servitude Volontaire*. (164)

While the well-known quote from Horace's *Ars Poetica* 4 highlights the writing of the *Essays* in the linear dimension and the one-dimensional paratactic nature of their flow, the work of Montaigne's painter suggests a spatial relationship, placing La Boétie's writing at the center and Montaigne's at the periphery. Although such an arrangement would appear to express a self-deprecating attitude toward Montaigne's own work, François Rigolot has argued convincingly that the characterization of the painting, and thus La Boétie's writing as "a rich, polished picture, formed according to art," carries negative connotations associated with artifice;⁴ indeed, Montaigne's own writing in the form of an essay has

⁴ "With Montaigne art has always a bad name; it means artificiality, un-naturalness . . ." (Rigolot 1983, 152).

been seen as evolving out of scholarly commentary, a discourse that surrounds quotations and topics, eventually displacing them.⁵

Montaigne's choice of *On Voluntary Servitude* was not, as the quote above suggests, merely because it came to mind while he was considering how best to pay homage to La Boétie in his own *Essays*: a little further along, he adds, "And yet I am particularly obliged to this work, since it served as the medium of our first acquaintance. For it was shown to me long before I had seen him, and gave me my first knowledge of his name..." (165).⁶ Yet there are other reasons as well. At the end of La Boétie's exposé of the mechanisms of subjugation of the tyrant (he subjugates them by playing them against each other⁷), he discusses the torment of the tyrant:

... the tyrant is never liked nor likes. Friendship is a sacred word, it's a holy thing; it never exists except between upstanding people and is the result of nothing but mutual esteem. It is kept alive not so much by kind deeds as by a good life. What makes a friend sure of another is the knowledge he has of his integrity: his guarantees are his good nature, faith, and steadfastness. Friendship cannot exist where there is cruelty, where there is disloyalty, where there is injustice.⁸

The passage is striking not only for its emphasis on the goodness of friendship as the antithesis of tyranny, but also for the elegiac quality of the style used to praise it. In this diametrical opposition between friendship and tyranny, one finds echoes of Cicero. The Roman orator saw tyranny and friendship in a similar light: *qui velit, ut neque diligit*

⁵ "Montaigne comes gradually to the textual realization that his essays have moved from the periphery to the center; they refuse to be considered as marginal, subsidiary..." (Rigolot 1983, 154). On the history of the genre of the essay, see Villey 1933. On the relationship between Montaigne's *Essays* and the numerous quotations from ancient authors that they contain, see McKinley 1981.

⁶ *Et si suis obligé particulièrement à cette piece, d'autant qu'elle a servy de moyen à nostre premiere acointance. Car elle me fut montrée longue piece avant que je l'eusse veu, et me donna la premiere connoissance de son nom...* (I, 26, 184). All references to the original French of Montaigne's essays are taken from the Villey edition.

⁷ *[L]e tiran asservit les subjects les uns par le moien des autres...* (68). All citations from La Boétie come from the Malcolm Smith edition, and the translations into English are my own.

⁸ ... le tiran n'est jamais aimé ni n'aime. L'amitié, c'est un nom sacré, c'est une chose sainte: elle ne se met jamais qu'entre gens de bien et ne se prend que par une mutuelle estime. Elle s'entretient non tant par bienfaits que par la bonne vie. Ce qui rend un ami assuré de l'autre, c'est la connoissance qu'il a de son intégrité: les repondens qu'il en a, c'est son bon naturel, la foi et la constance. Il n'y peut avoir d'amitié là où est la cruauté, là où est la desloiauté, là où est l'injustice (73-4).

quemquam nec ipse ab ullo diligatur, circumfluere omnibus copiis atque in omnium rerum abundantia vivere? (15).⁹

One could postulate that the reader Montaigne was fascinated by La Boétie's observations, which may have constituted the original impetus for wanting to meet him; what better way to honor the friend and the friendship than by devoting an entire essay to both?¹⁰ But this inspiration backfired. Because *On Voluntary Servitude* had been appropriated for the Huguenot cause in the 1570s, Montaigne could only mention it in a very circumspect way: he stresses that the treatise is the work of a young man, well received, but not the best he could do:

He wrote it by way of essay in his early youth, in honor of liberty against tyrants. It has long been circulating in the hands of men of understanding, not without great and well-merited commendation; for it is a fine thing, and as full as can be. Still, it is far from being the best he could do, and if at the more mature age when I saw him, he had adopted a plan such as mine, of putting his ideas in writing, we should see many rare things which would bring us very close to the glory of antiquity . . . (164–5)¹¹

The passage also reveals considerable preoccupation with *place*,¹² with both La Boétie's and Montaigne's own. The friend's treatise is not only presented as an *œuvre de jeunesse* (and thus excusable, a reflection of the errors of youth), but also, in terms of the honor it might bring its author, it is only a proto-essay: had La Boétie undertaken a project like the *Essays* later on, it is clear that La Boétie would have written great works that would make France (*nous*) *almost* as worthy of honor as antiquity.

⁹ "Who would wish to be surrounded by unlimited wealth and to abound in every material blessing, on condition that he love no one and that no one love him?" The Latin text of Cicero and English translation come from the Loeb edition of William Falconer.

¹⁰ Thus, as Tom Conley notes, "[Montaigne] puts 'friendship' in the thematic place that La Boétie had assigned to 'servitude'" (Conley 1998, 69), but it is La Boétie who offers the point of departure for the substitution.

¹¹ *Il l'escrivit par maniere d'essay, en sa premiere jeunesse, à l'honneur de la liberté contre les tyrans. Il court pieça és mains des gens d'entendement, non sans bien grande et méritée recommandation; car il est gentil, et plein ce qu'il est possible. Si y a il bien à dire que ce ne soit le mieux qu'il peut faire; et si, en l'aage que je l'ay connu, plus avancé, il eut pris un tel dessein que le mien, de mettre par escrit ses fantasies, nous verrions plusieurs choses rares et qui nous approcheroient bien pres de l'honneur de l'antiquité* (183–4).

¹² The word "place" itself appears when Montaigne mentions the few other works that La Boétie wrote: Montaigne is hopeful that La Boétie's *Memoire sur la pacification des troubles* and other scattered works *trouveront encores ailleurs peut estre leur place* (184).

As La Boétie's successor, Montaigne's implied claim to fame is surely at least as great as the promise he saw in his friend.¹³ It is not surprising then, that in picking up friendship where La Boétie had ended his critique of tyranny, Montaigne's relationship with him is described as having a utopian character, surpassing what can be found in books (and thus in antiquity):

... [the knowledge of La Boétie's name through his treatise] thus starting on its way this friendship which together we fostered, as long as God willed, so entire and so perfect that certainly you will hardly read of the like, and among men of today you see no trace of it in practice. (165)¹⁴

Montaigne does not only surpass the friend whose controversial work provided the impetus for Montaigne's friendship and for the homage paid to the friendship: by naming his essay "*De l'amitié*," Montaigne engages with Cicero's *De amicitia* and provides corrections to both Roman friendship and Cicero's analysis. Historical circumstances also invited the comparison, as both were writing during a period of civil war. For Cicero, friendship was both the cause of the conflict and the solution, given the role that it played, for example, in Julius Caesar's assassination and tensions between various members of the Roman aristocratic elite, such as between Mark Antony and Cicero himself.¹⁵ For Montaigne, the French Wars of Religion made it difficult for a moderate like himself to extoll the virtues of his friendship with the controversial La Boétie, let alone eulogize the friend; underlying both challenges was a fundamental

¹³ Rigolot observes: "he wrote 'by way of essay', which implies that the essay-writer, Montaigne, wrote the true literary masterpiece and becomes the rightful heir of the true father's 'bonnes lettres'" (Rigolot 1983, 153).

¹⁴ ... *acheminant ainsi cette amitié que nous avons nourrie, tant que Dieu a voulu, entre nous, si entière et si parfaite que certainement il ne s'en lit guère de pareilles, et, entre nos hommes, il ne s'en voit aucune trace en usage* (184).

¹⁵ See Thomas Habinek's succinct analysis: "As an institution of the classical Republic, it could be viewed with either nostalgia or cautious hope during the months between the assassination of Julius Caesar and the public break between Cicero and Mark Anthony ... the problematic nature of friendship during this period derived not only from its association with the lost Republic, but also from the tensions to which it was subjected during the civil turmoil of the 40s" (Habinek 1990, 166–7). I thank my colleague Andrew Riggsby for drawing my attention to this article and for his insightful comments on the *De amicitia* and the Roman civil wars.

preoccupation of Cicero, namely the conflict between loyalty to a friend and loyalty to the state.¹⁶

In writing the *De amicitia*, Cicero's goal was to take the standard terms of elite sociability and define them in a way so that they were not destructive. He did this by making such concepts as candor and remonstrance, which were traditionally applied to bonds with someone of lower status,¹⁷ a key obligation of elite friendship. Specifically, this makes it possible for each friend to hold the other to a high standard of virtue.¹⁸ The benefit of such shared values and the duty to hold one's friends to them, was, as Thomas Habinek notes, "an attempt to enhance the solidarity of the ruling elite" (Habinek 1990, 182), and Craig Williams shows how the tangible benefits and favors traditionally associated with friendship are transcended by Cicero's insistence that the true fruits of *vera amicitia* come from its basis in virtue.¹⁹

¹⁶ "Cicero's epistolary exchange with Matius (*Fam.* XI 27–8) over his alleged betrayal of a personal promise and the conflict between loyalty to Caesar and loyalty to the state or *res publica* provides a glimpse of what must have been an intense and widespread reconsideration of the meaning of friendship in a time of political upheaval and realignment of personal loyalties" (Habinek 1990, 167).

¹⁷ For example, Habinek underscores the differences separating Cicero's actual correspondence with Appius Claudius Pulcher from the type of friendship the former proposes in the *De amicitia*: "...no matter how compatible the sentiments, interests, and personalities of Appius and Cicero may be, it will be impossible for them to have the open and intimate relationship Cicero describes in the *Laelius* precisely because they are equals and therefore, in the world of the Roman aristocrat, by definition in competition with one another in the high-stakes games of power and influence" (177). Indeed such is Cicero's fear: *Quod si qui longius in amicitia propecti essent, tamen saepe labefactari, si in honoris contentionem incidissent; pestem enim nullam maiorem esse amicitii quam in plerisque pecuniae cupiditatem, in optimis quibusque honoris certamen et gloriae, ex quo inimicitias maximas saepe inter amicissimos exstitisse* (10). ("But should the friendship continue for a longer time, yet it is often overthrown when a struggle for office happens to arise; for while, with the generality of men, the greatest bane of friendship is the lust for money, with the most worthy men it is the strife for preferment and glory, and from this source frequently have sprung the deadliest enmities between the dearest friends.")

¹⁸ "In the *Laelius*, Cicero reinterprets the traditional right of free speech between friends as an opportunity and a duty to hold one's friend to an absolute standard of *virtus* that applies to both parties in the relationship" (Habinek 1990, 181). Soon after writing the *De amicitia*, Cicero applied this principle, notably, to his relationship with Mark Antony.

¹⁹ "[Cicero's *Laelius*] concludes that 'we' seek friendship not because we hope for material gain but because we know that the true benefit (*fructus*) friendship brings consists in the affection (*amor*) that lies at its heart. It is one of the central arguments of Cicero's *De amicitia*, in other words, that *vera amicitia*, precisely because it nurtures *virtus*, is in fact profoundly beneficial" (Williams 2012, 50). For more on Montaigne's reception of Cicero's *De amicitia* as it relates to the question of "true friendship," see Williams's essay in this volume.

As suggested earlier, Montaigne reads Cicero through his friend La Boétie—and corrects both. Before specifically discussing friendship, La Boétie had insisted a great deal on the *fraternelle affection* that binds men together and makes up for differences (41). La Boétie had explained that tyranny was made possible by the fact that, out of habit, men had given up their freedom, and that friendship was diametrically opposed to tyranny because it implied conscious choice, an expression of the will that in the case of friends becomes fused:

Reason has given us all this great gift of voice and speech so that we can make acquaintance and fraternize and make, through the common and mutual expression of our thoughts, a communion of our wills, and if it has been charged by all means with tightening and embracing the knot of our alliance and union, if it has demonstrated in all matters that it sought to make us not all united but all one, one must not doubt that we are all naturally free since we are all companions.²⁰

For Montaigne, this is what happens in friendship rather than in the social fabric as a whole. Seemingly inspired by the Ciceronian remarks, *est enim amicitia nihil aliud nisi omnium divinarum humanarumque rerum cum benevolentia et caritate consensio* (“For friendship is nothing else than an accord in all things, human and divine, conjoined with mutual goodwill and affection,” 6) and *amicum qui intuetur, tamquam exemplar aliquod intuetur sui* (“He who looks upon a true friend, looks, as it were, upon a sort of image of himself,” 7), Montaigne arrives at a description of his friendship with La Boétie in largely idealistic terms:

In the friendship I speak of, our souls mingle and blend with each other so completely that they efface the seam that joined them, and cannot find it again. If you press me to tell why I loved him, I feel that this cannot be expressed, except by answering: Because it was he, because it was I. (169)²¹

²⁰ [Raison] nous a donnée à tous ce grand présent de la voix et de la parole pour nous accointer et fraterniser davantage et faire par la commune et mutuelle déclaration de nos pensées une communion de nos volontés, et si elle a taschée par tous moïens de serrer et estreindre si fort le nœud de nostre alliance et société, si elle a monstré en toutes choses qu'elle ne vouloit pas tant nous faire tous unis que tous uns, il ne faut pas faire doute que nous ne soions tous naturellement libres puis que nous sommes tous compagnons (42).

²¹ En l'amitié dequoy je parle, elles se meslent et confondent l'une en l'autre, d'un mélange si universel, qu'elles effacent et ne retrouvent plus la couture qui les a jointes. Si on me presse de dire pourquoy je l'aymois, je sens que cela ne se peut exprimer, qu'en respondant: Par ce que c'estoit luy; par ce que c'estoit moy (188).

Given this fusion of souls, the fundamental question remains of how far a friend should go in following the will of another friend, who for all intents and purposes is to be considered another self. The turning point for both Cicero and Montaigne is the retelling of the famous episode, later reprised by Plutarch, involving the plebs-friendly Roman tribune Tiberius Gracchus and his ally Gaius Blossius. The latter had come to Laelius to request a pardon,

...deprecatum venisset, hanc ut sibi ignoscerem causam afferrebat, quod tanti Ti. Gracchum fecisset, ut quidquid illi vellet sibi faciendum putaret. Tum ego, "etiamne," inquam, "si te in Capitolium faces ferre vellet?" "Numquam voluisset id quidem, sed, si voluisset, paruisssem." (11)

[Gaius Blossius] ... came to me to plead for leniency ... and offered, as a reason for my pardoning him, the fact that his esteem for Tiberius Gracchus was so great he thought it was his duty to do anything that Tiberius requested him to do. Thereupon I inquired, "Even if he requested you to set fire to the Capitol?" "He never would have requested me to do that, of course," said he, "but if he had I should have obeyed."

Laelius', and therefore Cicero's, reaction had been strongly condemnatory: he exclaims *nefaria vox* ("what an impious remark that was!" 39), attributing to Blossius a sort of *amentia* ("madness") which results, ultimately, in his demise. After observing that Blossius did more than just follow (*ita fecit, vel plus etiam quam dixit*), for he became the leader of Gracchus' fury, Laelius concludes, "It is no justification whatever of your sin to have sinned in behalf of a friend" (*Nulla est igitur excusatio peccati, si amici causa peccaveris, 37*).

Indeed, in this case, while Cicero recognizes that true friendship implies granting whatever a friend may desire or obtaining from a friend whatever one wishes, this seemingly complete agreement in all things (*consensio*) must nevertheless be predicated on the mutual embrace of virtue: if one forsakes virtue, the friendship should also cease.²²

²² Nam, cum conciliatrix amicitiae virtutis opinio fuerit, difficile est amicitia manere, si a virtute defeceris. Quod si rectum statuerimus vel concedere amicis quidquid velint vel impetrare ab eis quidquid velimus, perfecta quidem sapientia si simus, nihil habeat res viti... ("For, since his belief in your virtue induced the friendship, it is hard for that friendship to remain if you have forsaken virtue. But if we should resolve that it is right, either to grant our friends whatever they wish, or to get from them whatever we wish, then assuming that we were endowed with truly faultless wisdom, no harm would result..." 11). But then he adds, *sed loquimur de eis amicis qui ante oculos sunt, quos videmus aut de quibus memoriam accepimus, quos novit vita communis* ("but I am speaking of the friends

Cicero's discussion of commonality of will in friendship and of the ensuing freedom is continually grounded in the political realities of his time, in an awareness of the typical flaws of the men of his class, of the practical limits of human wisdom, of the risks for social order. He therefore takes care to stipulate that friendship must be governed by a law:

Haec igitur lex in amicitia sancitur, ut neque rogemus res turpis nec faciamus rogati. Turpis enim excusatio est et minime accipienda cum in ceteris peccatis, tum si quis contra rem publicam se amici causa fecisse fateatur. (40)

Therefore let this law be established in friendship: neither ask dishonourable things, nor do them, if asked. And dishonourable it certainly is, and not to be allowed, for anyone to plead in defence of sins in general and especially of those against the State, that he committed them for the sake of a friend.

As already stated, Montaigne recounts the same episode in very similar terms, except that he has Laelius ask Blossius if he would have gone so far as to obey Gracchus if the latter had set fire to *nos temples* ("our temples") instead of the Capitol; the substitution may constitute a discreet allusion to contemporary events, since according to Cotgrave's French-English dictionary, "temples" can designate churches in sixteenth-century France.²³ Thereafter Montaigne diverges significantly from Cicero. Instead of exclaiming, as Laelius does, that Blossius's response was impious, Montaigne presents it mainly as a tactical error: "If he was such a perfect friend to Gracchus as the histories say, he did not need to offend the consuls by this last bold confession . . ." ²⁴ Yet he goes further, both refuting the judgment voiced by Laelius (and Cicero) and offering a defense in terms of the power of true friendship:

before our eyes, of those whom we see, or of men of whom we have record, and who are known to everyday life").

²³ *Quand Laelius, en presence des Consuls Romains, lesquels, apres la condamnation de Tiberius Gracchus, poursuivoient tous ceux qui avoyent esté de son intelligence, vint à s'enquerir de Caius Blossius (qui estoit le principal de ses amis) combien il eut voulu faire pour luy, et qu'il eut respondu: Toutes choses;—Comment, toutes choses? Suivit-il. Et quoy s'il t'eut commandé de mettre le feu en nos temples?—Il ne me l'eut jamais commandé, replica Blossius.—Mais s'il l'eut fait? Adjouta Laelius.—J'y eusse obey, respondit-il.* ("When Laelius, in the presence of the Roman consuls—who, after condemning Tiberius Gracchus, prosecuted all those who had been in his confidence—came to ask Gaius Blossius, who was Gracchus' best friend, how much he would have been willing to do for him, he answered: 'Everything.' 'What, everything?' pursued Laelius. 'And what if he had commanded you to set fire to our temples?' 'He would never have commanded me to do that,' replied Blossius. 'But what if he had?' Laelius insisted. 'I would have obeyed,' he replied." (170).

²⁴ *S'il estoit si parfaitement amy de Gracchus, comme disent les histoires, il n'avoit que faire d'offenser les consuls par cette dernière et hardie confession . . .* (189).

"But nevertheless, those who charge that this answer is seditious do not fully understand this mystery, and fail to assume first what is true, that he had Gracchus' will up his sleeve, both by power over him and by knowledge of him" (170).²⁵ One should note that despite a crime involving the burning of "temples," Montaigne shifts the original accusation from the domain of the religious ("impious") to the purely political ("seditious"), which is then made, in a sense, null and void by the sheer force of friendship; in another sense, we have moved from tyranny relying on largely involuntary processes, on acquiescence and custom (La Boétie), to friendship as a conscious, willful decision to enter into a socially and personally constructive relationship based on the pursuit of virtue (Cicero), to a concept of friendship as an inexplicable, indeed mysterious, force so powerful that it fuses the wills of those caught up in it: "if you press me to tell why I loved him, I feel that that cannot be expressed, except by answering: Because it was he, because it was I" (169). While Cicero sought to temper the considerations of profit and advantage traditionally associated with the Roman institution of friendship by insisting that it was founded on love, itself based on virtue,²⁶ Montaigne makes it clear that there is literally no place for them in the perfect friendship that he envisions (and claims to have experienced with La Boétie). Furthermore, Montaigne argues that friendship, by its very nature, cannot be subject to any laws or restrictions at all: "A single dominant friendship dissolves all other obligations" (172).²⁷ As if the political implications of this kind of friendship involving "the complete fusion of our wills" were not clear enough, Montaigne added in a note that was incorporated

²⁵ *Mais, toutefois, ceux qui accusent cette response comme seditieuse, n'entendent pas bien ce mystere, et ne presupposent pas, comme il est, qu'il tenoit la volonté de Gracchus en sa manche, et par puissance et par connoissance* (189).

²⁶ *Quapropter a natura mihi videtur potius quam indigentia orta amicitia, applicatione magis animi cum quodam sensu amandi, quam cogitatione quantum illa res utilitatis esset habitura* ("Wherefore it seems to me that friendship springs rather from nature than from need, and from an inclination of the soul joined with a feeling of love rather than from calculation of how much profit the friendship is likely to afford," 8). This is reiterated a little later: *Quam si qui putant ab imbecillitate proficisci, ut sit per quem sequatur quod quisque desideret, humilem sane reliquunt et minime generosum, ut ita dicam ortum amicitiae . . .* ("If people think that friendship springs from weakness and from a purpose to secure someone through whom we may obtain that which we lack, they assign her, if I may so express it, a lowly pedigree indeed . . ." 9).

²⁷ *L'unique et principale amitié descoust toutes autres obligations* (191).

into the 1595 posthumous edition of the *Essays*, "They were friends more than citizens, friends more than friends or enemies of their countries or friends of ambition and disturbance" (170), suggesting in a sense that friendship transcends citizenship.²⁸ He does, however, temper these declarations by appealing, in the end, to Cicero's provisos: Blossius' answer makes sense only if one supposes that he and Gracchus were guided by reason and a sense of what was right, for "if their actions went astray, they were by my measure neither friends to each other, nor friends to themselves."²⁹

This conclusion may appear a bit surprising. After correcting the Ciceronian principle of amicable castigation and riskily underscoring the transcendence of friendship over politics, Montaigne seems to be reassuring the reader in effect that political subversion "just shouldn't happen in true friendship," yet the upshot is an ongoing stress on how easy it is to get carried away in it.³⁰ Indeed, Montaigne reinforces this lesson with another example, not drawn from Cicero, in which he entertains the hypothetical situation where someone asks Montaigne whether he would kill his daughter if his will ordered him to do it:

For that matter, this answer has no better ring than would mine if someone questioned me in this fashion: "If your will commanded you to kill your daughter, would you kill her?" and I said yes. For that does not bear witness to any consent to do so, because I have no doubt at all about my will, and just as little about that of such a friend. (170)³¹

Here again, Montaigne suggests that to speak of the notion of consent in friendship is as nonsensical as it would be to do so in the case of a single person, precisely because of the fusion of wills. However, Montaigne also

²⁸ *Ils estoient plus amis que citoyens, plus amis qu'amis et qu'ennemis de leur païs, qu'amis d'ambition et de trouble* (189).

²⁹ *... et faictes guider cet harnois par la vertu et conduite de la raison (comme aussi est-il du tout impossible de l'atteler sans cela), la response de Blossius est telle qu'elle devoit estre. Si leurs actions se demancharent, ils n'estoient ny amis selon ma mesure l'un de l'autre, ny amis à eux mesmes* (189).

³⁰ See also David Lewis Schaefer's comments: "Montaigne assures the reader that the fact that Blossius and Gracchus were friends more than citizens need not alarm those who care for the state" (Schaefer 1998, 45).

³¹ *Au demeurant cette response ne sonne non plus que feroit la mienne, à qui s'enquerroit à moy de cette façon: Si vostre volonté vous commandoit de tuer vostre fille, la tueriez vous? et que je l'accordasse. Car cela ne porte aucun tesmoignage de consentement à ce faire, par ce que je ne suis point en doute de ma volonté, et tout aussi peu de celle d'un tel amy* (189).

deftly shifts the reader's attention from an overtly political example to a clearly familial one, thus downplaying the possible parallels between the Blossius–Gracchus example and Montaigne's friendship with La Boétie. Indeed, Montaigne is so careful to avoid suggesting any connection between friendship and governmental overthrow that even his praise of the famous tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogeiton is mitigated by his condemnation of Greek homosexuality ("that other, licentious Greek love . . . justly abhorred by our morality"³²), his careful contextualization of their case, and overarching dismissal of their relationship as inferior because it is founded on inequality.³³

Despite Montaigne's efforts to situate friendship outside of the sphere of politics, his depiction of friendship is described in monarchical terms that also betray the influence of La Boétie. A bit later in the essay, Montaigne uses the language of the phenomenon of voluntary servitude under tyranny (or monarchy) decried by his friend when he declares that friendship "rules" the soul and has absolute "sovereignty" over it.³⁴ In a sense, perfect or ideal friendship is conceived of as a sort of monarchical system of government whose subjects—friends—exercise the very freedom, *liberté volontaire*, which La Boétie declared was denied under kingship. Furthermore, it has a similar theological grounding, being sanctioned by God's will or fate,³⁵ but supersedes all other obligations.

³² P. 168 in the Villey edition: *cet' autre licence Grecque . . . justement abhorrée par nos meurs* (187). Cf. Craig Williams's discussion in this volume.

³³ "... they say that there resulted from it fruits very useful personally and to the public; that it constituted the strength of the countries which accepted the practice, and the principal defense of equity and liberty: witness the salutary loves of Harmodius and Aristogeiton. Therefore they call it sacred and divine. And by their reckoning, only the violence of tyrants and the cowardice of the common people are hostile to it. . . . I return to my description of a more equitable and more equable kind of friendship" (169), (... ils disent qu'il en provenoit des fruicts tres utiles au privé et au public; que c'estoit la force des païs qui en recevoient l'usage, et la principale defence de l'équité et de la liberté: tesmoin les salutaires amours de Harmodius et d'Aristogiton. pourtant la nomment ils sacrée et divine. Et n'est, à leur compte, que la violence des tyrans et lascheté des peuples qui luy soit adversaire. . . . Je revien à ma description, de façon plus equitable et plus equable) (188).

³⁴ "[T]his friendship that possesses the soul and rules it with absolute sovereignty cannot possibly be double" (172), (*cette amitié qui possède l'ame et la regente en toute souveraineté, il est impossible qu'elle soit double*) (191). An earlier version of this argument about the intersection between friendship and sovereignty can be found in my article, "Homer, la Boétie, Montaigne, and the Question of Sovereignty" (Bizer 2008).

³⁵ "Beyond all my understanding, beyond what I can say about this in particular, there was I know not what inexplicable and fateful force that was the mediator of this union" (169), (*Il y a, au delà de tout mon discours, et de ce que j'en puis dire particulièrement, ne*

Montaigne's essay "On Friendship" was intended to be both an homage to his great friend La Boétie and a foreword to the latter's work *On Voluntary Servitude*, but had to suppress the controversial treatise because of the politics of the Wars of Religion; what appears in the middle of this essay located at the center of the first book is almost a translation of a famous passage from Cicero's own discourse on friendship. We have seen that Cicero's *De amicitia* was corrected by the French essayist who sought both to affirm the omnipotent power of friendship—as part of his homage to La Boétie—and denied that it could lead to political upheaval. All this while observing in his own time, as Cicero did during Roman civil conflict, the perils of putting friendship before the interests of the country. According to Cicero's Laelius, Blossius had erred in doing whatever his unscrupulous friend Tiberius Gracchus wanted, but Montaigne rewrites Ciceronian friendship by removing the safeguards that Cicero sought to impose. In a sense, Cicero, painfully aware that the particularities of the Roman institution of friendship had aggravated civil discord, wanted to mold elite friendship in order to save the republic; for Montaigne, living under completely different historical circumstances, it is, in effect, war that shapes friendship, pushing it to the periphery of conflict and giving it an otherworldly character.³⁶ Finally, Montaigne's very insistence on friendship's omnipotence as a form of involuntary servitude can also be seen as a clever way to excuse his association with La Boétie and the error of choosing to enshrine an anti-monarchical work in his own.³⁷

As Craig Williams illustrates in the next chapter, there is, from Cicero to Montaigne and thereafter, an ongoing discussion about the proper

sçay quelle force inexplicable et fatale, mediatrice de cette union) (188). Montaigne's friendship with La Boétie lasted "as long as God willed it" (*tant que Dieu a voulu*) (184). As Conley notes, "What is so 'voluntary' about self-interested friendships in the classical tradition becomes 'involuntary' or almost sublimely unconscious in the gist of the essay" (72).

³⁶ For a slightly different perspective, see André Tournon's formulation: *Montaigne adopte sans réserve les valeurs proclamées par son ami, mais pose le problème de leur inscription dans le réel* ("Montaigne adopts without reservations the values proclaimed by his friend, but poses the problem of their inclusion in reality," Tournon 1990, 81).

³⁷ Of course, part of the idealization of the friendship seems part and parcel of the genre of the eulogy. For another perspective on why the idealizing tone of "On Friendship" is different from that of the rest of the *Essays*, see Hoffmann's essay (2015), "Was Montaigne a Good Friend?" I am very grateful to George Hoffmann for providing me with a pre-publication copy of his essay, reading a draft of this article, and offering truly stimulating and insightful feedback.

place of friendship in political—and literary—life. Montaigne's rejection of Roman friendship as error can be inscribed in the phenomenon of the crisis of exemplarity, the gradual questioning of the value of ancient models for understanding the present, which progressively freed early-modern authors from the burden of imitating the past.³⁸ We see this in Montaigne's characterization of La Boétie's promise as a writer who could almost have met ancient standards, while Montaigne's own friendship with La Boétie—and presumably his literary depiction of it—is without parallel. The fact that some critics have taken Montaigne at his word and viewed his characterization of ideal friendship as autotelic and autonomous can be seen as a reflection of this phenomenon, but also of the success of his rhetoric; yet Montaigne's tacit acknowledgment, through the pervasive use of such rhetoric, that friendship among the elite is inherently political, surely holds true for our times as well.³⁹

³⁸ There are numerous critical works on the subject of the crisis of exemplarity. For background on the subject, see Lyons 1990; Hampton 1990.

³⁹ See Alan Bray's illuminating observation: "The principal difference between the friendship of the modern world and the friendship I describe in this book is that, in the traditional culture that it explores, friendship was significant in a public sphere. In modern civil society friendship has not been perceived to be a public matter, or more precisely *ought* not to be so" (Bray 2003, 2).

3

Friends, Romans, Errors

Moments in the Reception of *amicitia*

Craig Williams

In this chapter I consider a small but representative selection of moments in the story of the reception of Roman friendship in the Western textual tradition, with attention to the role of binarisms of the type *true/false*, *correct/incorrect*, or *right/wrong* in texts belonging to the interrelated genres of philosophical, popular-philosophical, and scholarly prose. I do not pretend, of course, to tell or even summarize the long and complex story of the reception of Roman friendship, but instead I wish to draw attention to how these texts illustrate a recurring theme of that story in their tendency to circle around questions like these: Is that which Latin texts call *amicitia* really friendship? Did the Romans get friendship somehow wrong? As we will see, these questions are loaded with significance for questions of language and meaning as well as for the cultural politics of gender and sexuality, and in the end I suggest that ongoing debates on right and wrong ways of interpreting *amicitia* well illustrate some of the implications of the scholarly practice of identifying and correcting error.

Michel de Montaigne, *De l'amitié* (1580)

I begin with a key moment in the history of Western writing on friendship after antiquity. In his essay *De l'amitié*, Michel de Montaigne reflects on the intense friendship which he had experienced with Étienne de La Boétie, summarizing its essence in a much-quoted formulation: "Were I to be pressed to say why I loved him, I feel that it can be expressed only by replying, 'Because it was he, because it was I' (*par ce que c'estoit luy,*

par ce que c'estoit moy, 79).¹ This friendship, Montaigne writes, was one which “together we fostered as long as God willed, so complete and so perfect (*si entiere et si parfaite*) that surely nothing like it can be read of and no trace of it can be seen practiced among the men of today” (74). A “perfect” and “complete” friendship of this type cannot, then, be found among Montaigne’s contemporaries. What about the friendship experienced by men of earlier times, and in particular by Romans?

It is worth emphasizing that in *De l'amitié*, as throughout Montaigne’s work, “antiquity” and “the ancients” come with a great deal of authority, albeit not an unqualified authority: they are flawed models. To what extent are these flawed models specifically Greek or Roman? In *De l'amitié* Montaigne sometimes appeals to an undifferentiated “antiquity,” as when he justifies the exclusion of women from his ideal of the “perfect” friendship (an exclusion that has a long history in Western thought)² by means of an appeal to the “common agreement of the ancient schools” of philosophy (77); or when he builds up to the conclusion that ancient literature, in all its rich authority, is incapable of communicating truths about friendship to which he has access only through lived experience: “Even the treatises on this subject that antiquity has left us seem weak to me, compared with the feeling I have about it” (84). At other times, however, Montaigne appeals to models that are either specifically Greek—the conceptualization of two friends as “one soul in two bodies” is “Aristotle’s very apt definition” (*la très-propre definition d'Aristote*, 81) and Menander was “certainly right” (*il avait certes raison*) when he “said that anyone who managed to encounter just the shadow of a friend was a happy man” (84)—or specifically Roman: retelling the anecdote about Gaius Blossius’ friendship with Tiberius Gracchus that is central to Cicero’s *De amicitia* (and to Bizer’s essay in this volume), Montaigne observes that “Blossius’ reply is what it should have been” (*telle, qu'elle devoit estre*, 80).

¹ Translations of Montaigne’s French, and corresponding page numbers, are from Atkinson and Sices 2012; quotations from the French text are from the 2007 *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* edition of the *Essais*, which is used by Atkinson and Sices and based on the 1595 edition. Translations of the Latin in Montaigne’s essay and throughout this chapter are my own. For further discussion of Montaigne and La Boétie see Schachter 2008. Bizer’s essay in this volume reads Montaigne’s reading of Cicero’s *De amicitia* as identifying error on the question of political implications of elite male friendships.

² See Williams 2012, 63–7, for a brief overview.

This antiquity—sometimes Greek, sometimes Roman, sometimes undifferentiated—not only gives Montaigne a repertoire of names, sayings, anecdotes, and principles to cite either with approval or with qualification; it gives him a learned language in which he can easily, fluently write. And that language is Latin, not Greek.³ Throughout his essays Montaigne periodically adorns and supports the points he makes in his elegant French with Latin phrases which, for those readers equipped with the relevant knowledge or reference tools, turn out to be exact or carefully adapted quotations from classical authors. In the course of *De l'amitié* alone I count twelve such quotations.⁴ Although it is not a question of a simplistic alignment of Rome with the “correct” and Greece with the “incorrect” view of friendship, there is nonetheless a distinct imbalance between the twelve Latin quotations and the total absence of Greek quotations, or even a single Greek word, from this essay. A number of its authoritative anecdotes are set in ancient Greece, to be sure, and we have seen Montaigne’s approving citation of phrases from Aristotle and Menander, but these are entirely in French.

The Latin quotations, on the other hand, are seamlessly integrated into the French prose, without any markers of temporal or cultural difference, indeed usually without any indication whatsoever that they are quotations

³ Montaigne occasionally quotes Greek in his essays, and he famously caused both Latin and Greek quotations to be painted on the beams of his library in the Château de Montaigne. But in contrast to Latin, which he describes as his first language, taught him from the cradle by a German tutor who had no French, Montaigne claims little mastery of Greek (*De l'institution des enfans*: “Quant au Grec, duquel je n’ay quasi du tout point d’intelligence, mon pere desseigna me le faire apprendre par art, mais d’une voie nouvelle”). For detailed discussion of Montaigne’s Latin quotations see McKinley 1981.

⁴ To give a sense of scale, a modern English translation of the essay (Atkinson and Sices 2012) takes up fourteen pages. In sequence, the Latin quotations are on the following subjects: the importance of proportion in composition (Hor. *Ars P.* 4); a man who is known for loving his brothers like a father (Hor. *Carm.* 2.2.6); the passion for women mixes the bitter with the sweet (Catull. 68.17–18, adapted); skepticism regarding Greek-style erotic friendships between males (*amor amicitiae*, Cic. *Tusc.* 4.70); a Stoic definition of *amor* (Cic. *Tusc.* 4.72); friendship to be judged only after it has matured (Cic. *Amic.* 74); noninterference in others’ lives (Ter. *Haut.* 80); the pleasure of being with a friend (Hor. *Sat.* 1.5.44); a cluster of quotations giving voice to Montaigne’s grief at La Boétie’s death (Verg. *Aen.* 5.49–50, adapted; Ter. *Haut.* 149–50, adapted; Hor. *Carm.* 2.17.5–9, adapted; Hor. *Carm.* 1.24.1–2 followed by Catull. 68.20–6 and 65.9–11, spliced together and adapted). There is also a French paraphrase of a passage from Cicero on the pressing question of what to do if a friend asks you to do something wicked (Cic. *Amic.* 37: “Quand Laelius en presence des Consuls Romains . . .”) and an Italian quotation on the tendency of erotic passion to chase after that which flees (Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* 10.7.4–8, in turn inspired by Hor. *Sat.* 1.2.105–8).

(“as Cicero wrote . . .” or “in Horace’s words . . .” or “to quote Vergil . . .”). In a type of code-switching characteristic of learned European writing for centuries, Montaigne simply slides from French into Latin and back again. Here, for example, are his words on the relationship between friendship and erotic desire.

D’y comparer l’affection envers le femmes, quoy qu’elle naisse de nostre choix, on ne peut: ny la loger en ce rolle. Son feu, je le confesse,

neque enim est dea nescia nostri

quae dulcem curis miscet amaritiam,

et plus actif, plus cuisant, et plus aspre.

To compare this with the affection for women, though it is born of our own choice, cannot be done nor can it be put in the same category. Its fire, I confess,

neque enim est dea nescia nostri

quae dulcem curis miscet amaritiam

[for she is not ignorant of me, that goddess who mixes sweet bitterness with anxieties]

is more active, more burning, harsher. (76)

And here are his reflections on philosophical writing about friendship:

Car les discours mesmes que l’antiquité nous a laissé sur ce subject, me semblent lasches au prix du sentiment que j’en ay. Et en ce poinct les effects surpassent les preceptes mesmes de la philosophie. *Nil ego contulerim iucundo sanus amico.*

Even the treatises on this subject that antiquity has left us seem weak to me, compared with the feeling I have about it. And in this case the reality surpasses even the precepts of philosophy. *Nil ego contulerim iucundo sanus amico.* [As long as I am in my right mind, I would compare nothing to a delightful friend.] (84)

For Montaigne, then, the philosophical writings of an undifferentiated Greco-Roman antiquity are trumped by subjective personal experience (“le sentiment que j’en ay”), an experience which he evokes by seamlessly transitioning into Latin, quoting classical poetry without signaling the fact that he is doing so. Thereby he fashions himself and his readership as learned Europeans capable of freely exchanging quotations from a shared repertoire of knowledge regarding Latin literature and ancient Roman culture generally.⁵ On the point of friendship, this shared knowledge seems to entail a perspective according to which Rome functions as

⁵ Those equipped to identify the sources of the two quotations above will discover that they are not taken from philosophical texts (Cicero’s *De amicitia* would have been a natural) or even from Lucretian didactic poetry, but from erotic elegy and verse satire

a model that, unless explicitly identified as inadequate or erroneous, basically got things right.

By contrast, we find an explicit reference to Greek error when Montaigne turns to the question of whether erotic desire can coexist with the “perfect” kind of male friendship that is his interest.

Et cette autre licence grecque est justement abhorée par nos moeurs. Laquelle pourtant, pour avoir selon leur usage, une si nécessaire disparité d’âges, et différence d’offices entre les amants, ne respondoit non plus assez à la parfaite union et convenance qu’icy nous demandons. *Quis est enim iste amor amicitiae? Cur neque deformem adulescentem quisquam amat, neque formosum senem?*

As for that other Greek license, our mores rightly abhor it. Moreover, since according to their custom there was such a necessary disparity in age and difference in the lovers’ duties, it did not correspond well enough to the perfect union and harmony we are asking for here: *Quis est enim iste amor amicitiae? Cur neque deformem adulescentem quisquam amat, neque formosum senem?* [After all, what is that love of friendship? Why does no one ever fall in love with an ugly young man or a handsome old man?] (77)⁶

Ancient Greek friendships of this kind are marked by error on two counts: they are charged with sexual desire, and the difference in age between the participants clashes with Montaigne’s ideal of a union between equals. And Montaigne follows up an assertion in French that this Greek version of friendship was flawed with two pointed questions in Latin which convey skepticism about the bottom line of “that Greek license.” The contrast between Greek error and “our” mores has the effect of aligning “us” with a correct perspective, one that is voiced in French and backed up with Latin quotations unaccompanied by any markers of cultural or temporal difference (“as a Roman poet once said”), let alone of error. The implication comes almost to the surface. On this crucial issue in male friendship, the Greeks fell into error, but the Romans did not—and neither do “we.”

(Catull. 68.17–18 and Hor. *Sat.* 1.5.44 respectively), genres marked precisely by their distance from such loftier, grander, heavier genres as philosophical prose or didactic or epic poetry.

⁶ Those who follow up on the quotation will find that it comes from a passage in Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* (4.70) where this kind of friendship is linked with characteristically Greek cultural practices (*mihi quidem haec in Graecorum gymnasiis nata consuetudo videtur, in quibus isti liberi et concessi sunt amores*). See Williams 2010, 68–9 and Williams 2012, 140–3.

C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (1960)

C. S. Lewis occupies a range of authoritative positions in anglophone textual culture: scholar of English literature, Christian apologist, and author of the immensely successful children's fantasy series *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Among Lewis's writings is *The Four Loves*, a text which speaks in an eloquent popular-philosophical mode from an avowedly Christian perspective and has found many readers over the past few generations. The four loves explored here are given the capitalized names Affection, Friendship, Eros, and Charity, terms which Lewis aligns with the Greek *στοργή*, *φιλία*, *ἔρως*, and *ἀγάπη* respectively. Lewis is particularly concerned to keep two of his four loves—Friendship and Eros—quite distinct, and his perspective is as baldly heteronormative as it is androcentric: Eros joins man to woman, Friendship joins man to man, and what joins woman to woman is a mystery to him.⁷

How does Roman friendship fit in here? First, it is important to note that Lewis by no means simplistically aligns pagan antiquity with “wrong” and Christian modernity with “right.” At one point he contrasts the high value placed on male friendship in earlier phases of Western culture, whether Christian or pagan, with modernity's valorization of heterosexual romantic love, and strongly implies that modernity suffers by the comparison: “Tristan and Isolde, Antony and Cleopatra, Romeo and Juliet, have innumerable counterparts in modern literature: David and Jonathan, Pylades and Orestes, Roland and Oliver, and Amis and Amile, have not” (Lewis 1960, 57). In the person of Antony, Rome provides one of three examples of romantic love between man and woman, but Rome is entirely absent from the catalogue of four pairs of male friends, which skips from the Hebrew Bible to Greek myth to the Christian Middle Ages.⁸ For whatever reasons, memorable friendships of

⁷ Cf. Lewis 1960, 77: “What were the women doing meanwhile? How should I know? I am a man and never spied on the mysteries of the Bona Dea.” Just as Montaigne speaks to and for a world of sixteenth-century Frenchmen, Lewis's four loves at times seem those of a certain stereotype of the mid-twentieth-century Englishman. When it comes to the second of the four loves, for example, we find that the ideal (male) friend is loyal and true, but unsentimental, taciturn, indirect, shy: “Lovers are always talking to one another about their love; friends hardly ever about their friendship; lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest” (Lewis 1960, 73).

⁸ For Orestes and Pylades as paradigmatic pair of friends in antiquity and beyond, see Williams 2012, 5–7, 148–55.

Roman literature such as those between Horace and Maecenas or Cicero and Atticus do not make the cut—nor, for reasons that more readily suggest themselves, does a Greek pair to whom we will shortly return: Achilles and Patroclus.

This is not to say that Rome has nothing to offer Lewis as he reflects on the history of friendship. On the contrary, Cicero appears in the same sentence as Aristotle. “What [many people today] are talking about has very little to do with that *Philia* which Aristotle classified among the virtues or that *Amicitia* on which Cicero wrote a book” (Lewis 1960, 58). The distinction is worth noting: Aristotle classified the virtues, while Cicero . . . wrote a book. The contrast between the achievement of classifying virtues and that of writing a book is reminiscent of a fundamental distinction between images of Greece and Rome widespread in Anglo-American popular culture through much of the twentieth century: here “the Glory of Greece” with its poetry, philosophy, and art, there “the Grandeur of Rome” with its roads, aqueducts, and conquests. And Lewis uses Greek rather than Latin terms to denote his four loves, perhaps not least because the distinction between Greek *φιλία* and *ἔρως* provides him with a semantic distinction that is closer to that between his “Friendship” and his “Love” than any pair of Latin words, such as *amicitia* and *amor*.⁹

Still, in the end Cicero does share the stage with Aristotle. And what Lewis identifies as the “correct” view of friendship is neither specifically Greek nor specifically Roman, but ancient: “If a man believes (as I do) that the old estimate of Friendship was the correct one, he can hardly write a chapter on it except as a rehabilitation” (Lewis 1960, 60). For Lewis as for Montaigne, then, an antiquity that is sometimes Greek, sometimes Roman, and sometimes undifferentiated is a source of important truths on the question of friendship. And both writers invoke this antiquity as they banish Eros from their idealized masculine friendship. Here are Lewis’s reflections.

This imposes on me at the outset a very tiresome bit of demolition. It has actually become necessary in our time to rebut the theory that every firm and serious friendship is really homosexual. [. . .] The homosexual theory therefore seems to me not even plausible. This is not to say that Friendship and abnormal Eros have never been combined. Certain cultures at certain periods seem to have tended to

⁹ See Williams 2012, 116–30 for further discussion.

the contamination. In war-like societies it was, I think, especially likely to creep into the relation between the mature Brave and his young armour-bearer or squire. The absence of the women while you were there on the warpath had no doubt something to do with it. In deciding, if we think we need or can decide, where it crept in and where it did not, we must surely be guided by the evidence (when there is any) and not by an *a priori* theory. Kisses, tears and embraces are not in themselves evidence of homosexuality. The implications would be, if nothing else, too comic. Hrothgar embracing Beowulf, Johnson embracing Boswell (a pretty flagrantly heterosexual couple) and all those hairy old toughs of centurions in Tacitus, clinging to one another and begging for last kisses when the legion was broken up . . . all pansies? If you can believe that you can believe anything. (Lewis 1960, 60–3)

The two writers use Greece and Rome in complementary ways as they identify and condemn error. Montaigne contrasts “that Greek license” with “our” ways, and implicitly aligns “us” with “the Romans,” who had the “correct” view of male friendship on the key point of desire. For his part, Lewis refrains from naming Greece in connection with the “contamination,” while insisting that Roman men—embodied, by means of a common synecdoche, in some hirsute centurions allegedly populating the pages of Tacitus¹⁰—got things right.

“Abnormal Eros,” we read in these pages, has a tendency to color male friendships in “certain cultures at certain periods.” Besides the passing use of the second-person pronoun to assert a transhistorical male camaraderie between author and implied reader (“the absence of the women while you were there on the warpath”),¹¹ Lewis’s quick sequence of cultural allusions raises a question or two. In an act of *damnatio memoriae*, no names are named, but “war-like societies” are diagnosed as being liable to “the contamination,” particularly in relationships between the

¹⁰ A search for occurrences of *centurio*- and *primipil*- in the Tacitean corpus turns up no passages narrating a scene of passionate embraces between centurions, but Lewis’s remark may recall the scene narrated at Tac. *Hist.* 4.46.3: rank and file soldiers from the German front, thinking they were about to be killed, embrace and seek farewell kisses from another group of soldiers separated out by Vespasian’s general Mucianus (*prensare commanipularium pectora, cervicibus innecti, suprema oscula petere*). The three attributes which Lewis (unlike Tacitus) gives his soldiers—hairiness, age, toughness—seem designed to de-eroticize them, and clearly function as signs of their unquestionable masculinity. And yet, while hairiness as privileged sign of virility is a theme found in the ancient textual tradition, Roman masculinity was entirely compatible with desire and sexual activity between males (see Williams 2010, 139–44 and *passim*), and masculinity as lived by Roman soldiers, hairy or not, was by no means exclusive of homoerotic desire (see Phang 2001, 262–95).

¹¹ In general, this text’s perspective is openly androcentric; cf. Lewis 1960, 69: “We admit of course that besides a wife and family a man needs a few ‘friends.’”

“mature Brave and his younger armour-bearer or squire.” The references to a “Brave” and “the warpath” seem to hint at European and Euro-American fantasies of North American Indian cultures,¹² the images of the “armour-bearer or squire” more or less clearly evoke medieval Europe, and the culminating references to English and Roman literature are explicit. But where is Greece? Where are the pairs of warriors so prominent in the Homeric poetry that stands at the very beginnings of Western literature? Any allusion to male friendships in connection with warfare in ancient Greece will almost certainly require a reference to Achilles and Patroclus, whose relationship has explicitly been cast as erotic in tellings of these tales since Aeschylus’ *Myrmidons* in fifth-century BCE Athens at least. Their total absence from Lewis’s pages is suggestive indeed.

Concepts of error are thick in the air here; how are they given expression? First, the uncharitable tone is worth noting, precisely because it is so dissonant in a text which eloquently pleads for the supremacy of Charity as the greatest form of Love. Lewis’s text traffics in typically mid-twentieth-century imagery of homosexual desire as abnormality, sickness, or pollution (“contamination,” “abnormal Eros,” “creeping in” [twice]); makes use of that brutal tool of normalization, the appeal to humor (“if nothing else, too comic”); reassuringly implies that the ancient Romans were in this and many other ways like the English; and is not above hurling an insult (“pansies”). Similarly, the language of logic and science—Lewis’s assertion of the “necessity” of “rebutting” a “theory” because it is “a priori” and based on no “evidence”—sits uncomfortably with two distinctly unscientific and illogical arguments: “the homosexual theory” is incorrect on the one hand because its “implications” would be “if nothing else, too comic,” and on the other hand because it simply *defies belief*. And yet for Lewis as for countless Christians over the centuries, certain things which may well defy belief in others, such as a virgin birth or a bodily resurrection from the dead, are profound and axiomatic truths, not least because generations of Christians have *believed* them. We return to Lewis’s remark quoted above: “If a man believes (as I do) that the old estimate of Friendship was the correct one, he can hardly write a chapter on it except

¹² There are passing references in Euro-American writings to the potential for homoerotic bonds among Native American men: see, for example, Demos 1994, 163 on the concern about “particular friendships” among Mohawk men expressed by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Jesuits. See Rifkin 2011 for a rich discussion of the “complex relationship between contested U.S. notions of sexual order and shifting forms of Native American political representation” (8).

as a rehabilitation” (Lewis 1960, 60). Seen in the light of his Christianity, this takes on confessional and proselytizing overtones. He *believes* a certain view of friendship to be true, and is therefore practically compelled to proclaim its truth, whereas things which he considers to be erroneous or false are *unbelievable*.

Lewis’s Tacitean centurions, then, embody his belief that when it comes to friendship and Eros the Romans, like the English, are on the side of the right and the true. But in Lewis’s view the Romans did not get everything right.

Religions devised for a social purpose, like Roman emperor-worship or modern attempts to “sell” Christianity as a means of “saving civilisation,” do not come to much. The little knots of Friends who turn their backs on the “World” are those who really transform it. Egyptian and Babylonian Mathematics were practical and social, pursued in the service of Agriculture and Magic. But the free Greek Mathematics, pursued by Friends as a leisure occupation, have mattered to us more. (Lewis 1960, 69)

In the absence of further detail, the allusion to those “little knots of Friends” who managed to transform the world while pursuing “the free Greek Mathematics . . . as a leisure occupation,” will be enigmatic to many readers, but to those in the know Lewis’s words evoke the importance of friendship to ancient Pythagoreans. Unclear, too, is the logical connection between these friends’ activity and the Roman practice of emperor-worship, but in any case the latter is condemned as an utter failure—not because it was somehow essentially “wrong” (that goes without saying in this Christian text), but because it “came to nothing.”

As we have seen, though, on a point of key importance to Lewis and to many of his contemporaries the Romans got something profoundly right. They did not allow “abnormal Eros” to “contaminate” male friendship; they were not a bunch of “pansies.” With this openly homophobic evocation of a rigorously heterosexual and thus “correct” Roman masculinity, accompanied by an implicit if somewhat confused contrast to what might have gone on in Greece, *The Four Loves* voices a perspective on classical antiquity that was widespread in anglophone culture throughout much of the twentieth century.¹³

¹³ In the early twenty-first century things are beginning to look different. For example, the HBO-BBC miniseries *Rome* (for which see Cyrino 2008) presents to its viewers a culture in which men openly avail themselves of the sexual services of slaves and prostitutes of both

Joseph Epstein, *Friendship: An Exposé* (2008)

The subtitle of Epstein's book, with its nod to the cultural clout of sensationalistic journalism and its professed drive to expose the *true story*, hints at the ways in which this book's approach to friendship speaks from a perspective characteristic of contemporary American popular culture. The same is true of Epstein's sixth chapter, whose title ("An Extremely Sketchy History of Friendship") makes a light-hearted admission that it is not a rigorous historical inquiry and probably puns on contemporary slang meanings of the adjective "sketchy": not entirely trustworthy, perhaps slightly dangerous, but potentially cool.

The titles of book and chapter alone, then, can be interpreted as sending this message to its readers: we are modern Americans; we have a healthy skepticism toward intellectuals and scholars and their ilk, but are prepared to listen to a strong voice which offers us an "exposé," and we are well disposed toward a professedly "sketchy" story as long as it has a veneer of historical detail. What does this contemporary American exposé have to say about ancient Greece and Rome?

Much more life is laid down for friends in classical than in biblical times. In Greek mythology, there are the famous friendships between Theseus and Perithous, Damon and Pythias, Orestes and Pylades. The great friendship in Homeric Greece is that between Achilles and his brother-in-law and beloved friend Patroclus. But this famous friendship seems a one-way concern, with Patroclus, though the elder of the two, used by Achilles as something of a gofer. (Epstein 2006, 57)

Whereas Lewis had limited his Greek exemplars of friendship to Orestes and Pylades, and had avoided any mention of the potentially uncomfortable case of Achilles and Patroclus, Epstein's repertoire is not only larger but he tackles Achilles and Patroclus head on. Or does he? Readers familiar with Greek and Roman narrative traditions may or may not be surprised by the omission of any hint at Eros in connection with the pair, but they will almost certainly be startled by Epstein's description of

sexes, and in which a young Octavian's mother encourages her son with a wink and a nod to indulge Julius Caesar's sexual desires. The normalcy of this behavior is taken for granted by *Rome's* thoroughly masculine Pullo, a "hairy tough" of a soldier if ever there was one. See Williams 2015 for varying views of Roman homosexuality in select works of anglophone historical fiction, in particular by Robert Graves, Gore Vidal, Robert Harris, and Steven Saylor.

Patroclus as Achilles' "brother-in-law" and "gofer." The latter term, with its colloquially breezy deflation of what in Homeric poetry is an unforgettably, poignantly powerful bond joining two men, may be the textual equivalent of nervous laughter, while the assertion that the two were brothers-in-law is just as unsubstantiated by ancient narrative traditions as is the anguished cry by Brad Pitt's Achilles in the film *Troy*: "HE KILLED MY COUSIN." I am tempted to describe these two features of Epstein's sketchy narrative of Achilles and Patroclus—constructing them as brothers-in-law on the one hand, and omitting any reference to the possibility of Eros on the other—as active and passive errors respectively and to suggest that they are signs of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has called "homosexual panic."¹⁴ In any case, the effect of readings of the pair in *Friendship: An Exposé* and *Troy* is obvious enough. The love shared by these two paradigmatic friends is safely situated in the realm of kinship, inborn or acquired. Such a love between men, so powerful and so stirring, *couldn't possibly* be fueled by something else.

Sketchy as it is, Epstein's narrative does claim to be history, and so it cannot entirely ignore that blending of Eros and friendship for which ancient Greece is widely if vaguely known outside the world of scholarship. Yet Epstein's single allusion to the possibility limits it precisely to the rarified atmosphere of scholarly debate: "Whether the relationships between older and younger men in Spartan society were pederastic is, among scholars, a matter still in the flux of controversy" (Epstein 2006, 58). The role of the erotic in ancient Greek or Roman friendship is thus reduced to the sole case of Sparta—which will almost certainly come as a surprise to anyone, scholar or not, who has even passing familiarity with Greco-Roman culture—and the use of the term "relationships" rather than "friendships" underscores a basic point made both implicitly and explicitly throughout Epstein's as throughout Lewis's reflections: friendship is friendship, sexual desire is sexual desire, and the two are best kept apart.¹⁵ For many of Epstein's readers, moreover, the adjective "pederastic"—a technical term in scholarly discussions of Greek and Roman sexuality, serving as shorthand to refer to the elaborate complex of cultural practices related to publicly celebrated erotic bonds joining adolescent and older males—is likely to evoke the significantly different

¹⁴ Sedgwick 1985, 83–96.

¹⁵ See e.g. Epstein 2006, xiii, 13, 21.

contemporary concept of “pedophilia,” a socially and legally penalized set of practices which are understood by their very definition to include the sexual abuse of prepubescent children of either sex by adults of either sex. Finally, Epstein’s parenthetical qualification that the question of pederasty in ancient Sparta is debated “among scholars” (a qualification which would puzzle most scholars)¹⁶ invites interpretation as a further expression of this text’s fundamentally anti-intellectual stance: some eccentric figures in their ivory tower may debate the point, but no one else would seriously consider the possibility that Spartan warriors were sexually attracted to each other. In short, Epstein’s passing reference to the possibility of desire in Greek friendship is comparable in effect to Lewis’s dismissal of the very idea that intense male friendships in ancient Rome or his own England over the ages might be “contaminated” by “abnormal Eros.” These texts work with strong concepts of right and wrong on questions of desire and friendship.

And what about Rome? “With the Romans,” Epstein writes, “friendship takes a political, or utilitarian, turn.”¹⁷ In view of a long and influential tradition of idealizing friendship as an emotionally rewarding experience—a tradition which Epstein’s book perpetuates—this identification of a turn to the political or utilitarian would seem to be identifying an error in Roman friendship. Yet Epstein’s words hint at more. While the association of friendship with the “utilitarian” certainly suggests a failure to live up to implicit ideals of altruistic affection, there is a fine line between the “utilitarian” and the “useful,” and there is a distinctly Anglo-American way in which the “useful” (like the “productive”) is a term of praise; and to describe something as “political”—especially when

¹⁶ No scholarship known to me makes the argument that Greek pederasty was limited to Sparta alone, and scholarly debate has turned not on the question of whether erotically colored relationships between older and younger males actually *existed* at Sparta (it is clear that they existed throughout the Greek world) but rather on the ways in which desire could acceptably be given physical expression by the partners in these relationships, something which may have varied from place to place.

¹⁷ Epstein 2006, 60. The statement recalls, and is no doubt informed by, an influential thread in the scholarship which has seen the essence of *amicitia* as a socially or politically beneficial alliance. Responding to this view, Konstan 1997 emphasizes that many key ancient texts envision *philia* or *amicitia* as a relationship based on affection. See Williams 2012, 44–54 and *passim*.

it is not entirely clear how the term is being used—is to identify it as interesting, controversial, a hot topic. In other words, when Romans took a “political, or utilitarian, turn” in friendship, they may indeed have committed an error, but it was an understandable, forgivable, perhaps even tempting error.

In order to illustrate the workings of this flawed but intriguing Roman friendship, Epstein chooses two men whose surviving correspondence has a great deal to say on the subject of *amicitia*. The first is Cicero.

Cicero was a man of many friendships and himself the author of one of the central texts on friendship, called *Laelius de Amicitia*. Not highborn but a so-called “new man,” Cicero was both brilliant and vain, noble of spirit and cowardly. Volatile in his passions, he was ambitious and acquisitive, made bad marriages, overrated his children, was ruinously prodigal, with a special weakness for real estate (he was house-proud) and art works, and nothing if not contentious—he begins to sound, as this description suggests, like the first modern man. (Epstein 2006, 60)

Just as Epstein’s “history of friendship” turns out to be a history of friendship in Western culture only—this is not an attempt at a global history, and Asian, African, or Native American examples of friendship make no appearance in these pages—his image of “the first modern man” has traits that are stereotypical of the modern American in particular: the ambition, the superficial materialism (Cicero is described as simultaneously acquisitive and wasteful), the obsession with owning real estate. Proto-American or not, Cicero is a powerful model in this sketchy history of friendship with and precisely *because of* these imperfections, contradictions, and flaws. He might just be “the first modern man,” making the same kinds of mistakes that many of “us” do today.

Not only Cicero’s experiences of friendship are flawed, but his writings on the subject are, too: Epstein refers to the Roman’s “sensible but useless piece of advice: take ‘such care in the selection of friends as never to enter upon a friendship with a man whom we could under any circumstances come to hate’” (Epstein 2006, 63). Here the language of the “useful” is employed in the negative, and contrasted with another characteristically Anglo-American term of approval, the “sensible.” Cicero thus emerges as a double failure, subscribing to an incorrectly “utilitarian” approach to friendship and giving advice which, although well meaning and on the surface “sensible,” is ultimately “useless.” In the end, though, Epstein encourages his readers not to be too harsh in their judgment of Cicero’s

errors and, by extension, those of countless other Romans: for, he reassuringly reminds his readers, “throughout history one realizes how rare is the perfect friend” (Epstein 2006, 63).

What at first glance seems a generously humane statement of the principle “no one is perfect” takes on another quality upon closer inspection. “The perfect friend” is not *impossible*, but very rare. The implication is that he, and by extension “we,” know what a perfect friend looks like, and thus that he and “we” can evaluate Cicero’s and more generally the Romans’ experience of friendship from a position of knowledge and authority. The conclusions to which the implied reader is being led seem thus to be the following. Like most friendships in human history, those of the Romans were as a rule imperfect and flawed. An error specifically characteristic of Roman friendships, however, was their “political” or “utilitarian” nature, and although Cicero was in many ways a prototype of the modern (American) man, our vantage point precisely as modern Americans allows us to see how the “uselessness” of one of his precepts on friendship compounds that error.

Epstein introduces the second of his paradigmatic Roman friends, Pliny the Younger, thus:

One sees friendship under the Roman Empire in full bloom, and much of it seems to turn on what we today call networking. A conscientious friend, Pliny seems always busy making connections for other friends . . . Pliny was an operator, but insofar as one can determine, most of the time an operator with no ulterior motive. He was an impressive broker of favors who chiefly wished to do well by his friends and his friends’ children, and who also saw friendship in the context of Roman concepts of justice and honor. (Epstein 2006, 61–2)

In many sectors of contemporary American culture, “networking” is the stuff of society and “conscientious” a term of great praise, high on the list along with “hard-working,” “decent,” and “honest.” On the other hand, to call someone an “operator” is ambivalent at best, yet the conclusion that “most of the time” the person in question has no “ulterior motives” will cover a multitude of sins. And the phrase “impressive broker of favors” combines an adjective of open praise with a noun alluding to that Holy of Holies of American life, the stock exchange, while any suggestion that Pliny was only out to make a fast buck on the market of society is swept away by the assurance that he “chiefly wished to do well by his friends and his friends’ children.” Accompanied by the claim that Pliny tried to live up to (undefined) “Roman concepts of justice and honor,”

this clinches the point. Pliny definitely had his flaws, but we are given to understand that his heart was in the right place.

Scholarly Prose

A theme with a long history in the speech genre of scholarly prose is that Roman friendship was something other than *true* friendship. Either by its very nature or in specific instances, the argument goes, *amicitia* was not *really* friendship, but rather a socially useful bond such as a political alliance or a patron–client relationship (compare Epstein’s “political, or utilitarian, turn”). Thus we find scholarly claims that certain Latin texts which speak of *amicitia* “cover up” or “mask” what is really at stake, or use the language of friendship “only by courtesy”; it is argued that what those Latin texts are referring to can “more accurately” be called patronage, or that “political alliances were claimed to be instances of personal friendship”; we sometimes find scare quotes around the word “friendship,” or the assertion that certain individuals called *amici* in Latin texts were not “authentic” or “actual” *amici*.¹⁸

Behind such claims lies the unexplored assumption that the scholarly writer and his or her readers share a knowledge of what “real friends” and “real friendship” (sometimes even “real *amici*” and “real *amicitia*”) actually are, and that this knowledge enables them to see through the Roman language of *amicitia*; the assumptions are the same as those which underlie Epstein’s assurance that “throughout history one realizes how rare is the perfect friend.” Scholars have variously described the nature of a specifically Roman error in friendship, depending on how they theorize (or not) the relationship between literature and history, between the textual and the social, between words and concepts.

¹⁸ Verboven 2002, 51: “It is beyond doubt that the terms *amicus* and *amicitia* served as euphemisms to cover up relations of factual dependence”; Rouland 1979, 463: “Le langage n’est donc ici qu’un masque, et les assimilations entre *clientela* et *amicitia* semblent bien n’avoir trompé personne”; Brunt 1988, 360–1: certain men were “*amici* only by courtesy,” but “more accurately, some were clients”; Powell 1990, 23: “political alliances were claimed to be instances of personal friendship”; Rawson 1978, 5: the “friendship” between Cicero and Pompey was “for the most part (...) created, maintained and destroyed by purely political factors”; Saller 1989, 57: those called *amici inferiores* “can appropriately be analysed under the heading of patronage”; Hellegouarc’h 1963, 56: “Il ne s’agit pas d’authentiques *amici*”; Spisak 1998, 246: “Martial clearly shows that he himself is quite aware of the sometimes subtle distinction between an actual *amicus* and a *cliens*.”

Sometimes it is asserted that Roman writers, or the Romans in general, consciously and strategically applied the language of friendship to something that was not actually friendship, or that they used the language of *amicitia* to describe relationships that were not “true” *amicitia*; sometimes the argument is that what Roman writers called *amicitia* was a flawed, partial, or false version of what “we” call “friendship”; and sometimes the implicit assumption that “we” have got it right—what “we” call “friendship” *is* friendship—comes to the surface, even as the question of who “we” are, speaking which language and acculturated when and where, remains unasked.

To be sure, scholarly allusions to “real friendship” or “real *amicitia*” correspond to a theme found in the ancient textual tradition itself, given expression, for example, by the phrase *vera amicitia*. Occurring in a small number of texts including Cicero’s *De amicitia* and Seneca’s *Epistulae morales*, the phrase refers to an ideal version of friendship, one which is marked by loyalty, frankness, and that profound intimacy to which the proverbial description of friendship as “one soul in two bodies” gave expression.¹⁹ Yet texts like the *De amicitia* and the *Epistulae morales*, generically marked as they are by a prescriptive claim on truth informed by philosophical traditions, stand in distinct contrast with the remarkable diversity of *amicitia* across the entire range of surviving Latin textuality, from literary texts in prose and verse to hundreds of inscriptions carved in stone, in particular epitaphs commemorating friends. As I have shown elsewhere, if we consider that entire range, another way of looking at *amicitia* in general and the language of “true friendship” in particular opens up. There are various kinds of *amici* and various kinds of *amicitia*: some kinds are held to be more rewarding than others, more beneficial, longer-lasting, more satisfying, or existing for a better reason; but they are all *amici* and it is all *amicitia*.²⁰

¹⁹ Cic. *Amic.* 22: *neque ego de vulgari aut de mediocri [sc., amicitia], quae tamen ipsa et delectat et prodest, sed de vera et perfecta loquor*; Sen. *Ep.* 3.2: *si aliquem amicum existimas cui non tantundem credis quantum tibi, vehementer erras et non satis nosti vim verae amicitiae*.

²⁰ Cicero more than once ponders the contrast between his highly meaningful relationship with Atticus and other, less valuable instances of *amicitia* in his life (e.g. Cic. *Att.* 1.18: *nam illae ambitiosae nostrae focosaeque amicitiae sunt in quodam splendore forensi, fructum domesticum non habent*). The anonymous writer of the *Commentariolum petitionis* observes that when running an electoral campaign one uses the term *amicus* more flexibly than in other spheres of life, and advises the deployment of “friends of every kind” ([Cic.]

Instead of weighing any given reference to *amicitia* in a Latin text against an ideal expressed in a proverb or explored by Cicero, by way of measuring the gap between ideal and practice as if it were identical to that between truth and error (and as if either philosophical texts or proverbs gave us direct and unproblematic access to “the truth” about *amicitia*), or instead of attempting to reconstruct what Roman friendship was or was not, comparing it with “our” ideas of what friendship “really” is or is not (as if it were clear who “we” are, and as if “we” had an unquestioned hold on the truth about friendship), I have argued for another approach. Rather than attempting to get *behind* texts or *below* the surface of language in the interests of determining what was or is “really” there, in the process identifying error, we can remain on the surface, with language. If we do so, the inquiry acquires a different aim and questions of error become less urgent, indeed largely irrelevant. We can begin with the heuristically naive assumption that someone who is called an *amicus* or *amica* in a given text is precisely that, an *amicus* or *amica*—regardless of whatever else she or he may have been (patron, client, political ally, lover), and regardless of whether or not we would be inclined to call him or her a “friend.” In other words, rather than reading Cicero’s prose, Martial’s epigrams, Catullus’ poetry, the letters of Pliny and Fronto, and hundreds of surviving Latin inscriptions with an eye to what they tell us about “friendship” understood as a cross-cultural, transhistorical, and interlingual constant, we can read these texts with an eye to the rich variety of detail they can give us about *amicitia*.

The term *faux amis* or “false friends” is itself an old friend from the theory and practice of language learning. It is a way of describing the phenomenon whereby a given word in the language being learned seems familiar from the learner’s first language (or other reference language), but the familiarity positively misleads the learner, sometimes in the extreme: German *Gift*, for example, semantically corresponds not to English *gift* but to English *poison*. More subtle and thus perhaps more insidious is the case precisely of German *Freund* (and its feminine *Freundin*) and English *friend*. To be sure, *Freund(in)* and *friend* exhibit semantic overlap to a very high degree and the words most often serve as

Comment. pet. 16–18: *sed hoc nomen amicorum in petitione latius patet quam in cetera vita . . . sunt instituendi cuiusque generis amici*). The point can be generalized: the language of *amicitia* could be and was used of a wide range of relationships.

each other's most fitting translations. But not always. On the one hand, in contemporary usage the noun *Freund(in)* is generally reserved for someone who in English would most likely be called a "good friend" or a "close friend," someone whom one has known for a long time, with whom one has an intimate trusting relationship. Others, less intimately bonded and probably more numerous, who might well be called *friends* in English are in German typically called one's *Bekannte*, "acquaintances"—crucially, the German word sounds nowhere near as distancing as the English. On the other hand, in the presence of specific syntactical and contextual markers, *Freund* and *Freundin* can signify (nonironically, without imagined scare quotes) a partner in a stable erotic or romantic relationship outside of marriage, something like English *boyfriend/girlfriend* or *partner*. In short, a *Freund* is not quite the same as a *friend*.

The issue takes us to the heart of the fields of lexical semantics (what do we mean when we talk about what a word "means"?) and translation studies (can a word in one language ever be "the same as" a word in another?). Anthropological linguistics, too, has much to offer, such as this insight: "Reliance on one's native language as a source of universally valid 'common-sensical' assumptions about human nature and human relations is bound to lead to ethnocentric fallacies."²¹ In other words, when scholarly texts written in a variety of languages appeal to what "we" think friendship is, or to "our" understanding of it, alarm bells should go off. When scholars measure *amicitia* against "friendship as we conceive it," "unser Verständnis von Freundschaft," "quella realtà che noi intendiamo per amicizia," or "ce qu'on entend par amitié,"²² might it be that they are being misled by false friends? It is not, to be sure, like looking for a *gift* and finding *Gift*, but perhaps it is something like looking for a *friend* and finding a *Freund*.

As it happens, the linguist I have just quoted devotes one of her chapters to a set of words in other languages whose semantics partly overlap with English *friend*: Russian *drug*, *podruga*, *prijatel'*, *tovarišč*,

²¹ Wierzbicka 1997, 34.

²² Price 1989, 131; Rundel 2005, 163; Pizzolato 1993, 133; El Murr 2001, 34. Cf. also White 1993, 13 ("we find it difficult to think of them as truly friends"); Kleijwegt 1998, 25 ("friendship as we know it today").

and Polish *przyjaciół*, *kolega*, *znajomy*, along with some remarks on Australian English *mate*. Latin *amici* appear in a passing remark:

This is, of course, quite different from the classical (Roman) conception of *amicitia*, which (as presented by Cicero in *De amicitia*) was held to be based on mutual good will and affection, and which was seen as implying the duty of correcting a friend (*amicus*) when necessary. The older English concept of *friend*₁ was clearly closer to that Roman conception than the concept encoded in the modern English *friend*₂.²³

While as a Latinist I am pleased to see “the classical conception” of something illustrated, for once, by Rome rather than by Greece, two fundamental assumptions underlying this summary of “the classical (Roman) conception of *amicitia*” invite challenge: that one can so smoothly slide from a single text—and an idealizing, prescriptive text at that—to “the Roman,” and that one can meaningfully speak of *the* conception of friendship, in whatever language.

Concluding Remarks

The language of right and wrong, of the correct and the erroneous, fundamentally marks the stories of friendship in ancient Rome told by the texts I have briefly presented above. Montaigne writes of a “Greek license” that is “justly abhorred by our mores” while implying that Romans did not make this mistake. Lewis commits himself to rehabilitating a “correct” ancient view of friendship and vigorously attempts to “demolish” what he calls “the homosexual theory” of friendship by evoking some dimly remembered or simply invented Tacitean centurions. Epstein speaks of Cicero’s “sensible but useless” advice on making friends. Some scholarly texts, using phrases like “real friendship” and “authentic *amici*,” openly appeal to a concept of error, whether within or across cultures and languages; others, mapping *amicitia* on to “our” idea of friendship, usually in such a way as to indicate divergences, more or less subtly urge the conclusion that Romans got this or that aspect of friendship wrong.

²³ Wierzbicka 1997, 52. See e.g. Luftig 1993, 93–127 for the diachronic developments in the semantics of English *friend* to which Wierzbicka is referring.

Sometimes, Romans are represented as getting something important about friendship wrong (for example, by calling political allies or powerful patrons their *amici* when they were not really “friends” and perhaps not even true *amici*), but sometimes they are seen as getting it right (for example, by keeping friendship hermetically sealed off from desire). I have advocated for another approach, one which does not identify true and false versions of friendship, or accurate or inaccurate uses of the language of *amicitia*. This approach does not try to determine whether or not certain relationships in ancient Rome were “really friendship” or not; it does not seek to describe, let alone to impose or police, boundaries between friendship and erotic desire. And yet I have approvingly quoted a linguist who warns against committing the “fallacy” of making universalizing conclusions about human nature and social relations on the basis of one’s native language; and even as I have expressed agreement with her basic point, I have identified oversimplifications in her argumentation. Likewise, my proposal that something comparable to the linguistic phenomenon of “false friends” may be at work in some scholarly writing on *amicitia* itself appeals to a concept of error: those friends are after all *false*. And am I not suggesting that Lewis is *wrong* to dismiss the very possibility of erotic desire among Roman centurions more generally, *wrong* to use the language of “contamination” and “abnormality”? Do I not identify *error* in Epstein’s identification of Patroclus as Achilles’ brother-in-law, in his implication that the only place in the ancient Greek world where pederasty was acceptable was Sparta, and in his assertion that even that is open to scholarly debate?

Constructing and evaluating arguments and seeking to persuade one’s readers are practices which lie at the heart of scholarly writing. What of the identification and correction of error? More than three decades ago, Stanley Fish (1980) advocated for a type of scholarly writing in the humanities which, rather than identifying its principal aim as *proving* this or that to be right or wrong, true or false, instead has the goal of *persuading* others of the plausibility of certain interpretations. The challenging and productive question remains whether this kind of scholarly writing should, as one of its persuasive techniques, make use of the concept of error, and if so, how and why.

4

Past Sovereignty

Roman Freedom for Modern Revolutionaries

Joy Connolly

From the United States to Haiti, France to Bolivia and beyond, the revolutions of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have diverse histories, but their agents all share the distinctive conviction that, in Condorcet's words, "The word 'revolutionary' can be applied only to revolutions whose aim is freedom" (Arendt 1963, 29). The other link connecting the revolutionaries of this period is their resourceful use of Rome—or more accurately, the shifting assemblages of image and quotation composed and remade over time in memory and fantasy that for sanity's sake we call "Rome." Like the word "LIBERTAS" that James Harrington sets in large capitals at the head of the proclamation establishing the ideal constitution in his 1656 utopian treatise *Oceana*, Rome functions as a symbol for the freedom the Enlightenment-era revolutionaries sought (Harrington 1992). In the course of this era's revolutionary moment, the Romans came to be identified as the exemplars and spiritual fathers of modern Western freedom—a move most contemporary political theorists identify as an error, thanks to the deep discordance between Roman values and liberal democratic ones.¹

Through most of the twentieth century, historians saw early American memories of the Greek and Roman past as the passive backdrop to

¹ See, for example, Herzog (2003) and, for a review of critiques, Connolly (2014, 10–14).

revolutionary experience, the product of a convention-bound set of schooltexts that at best provided white men of only slightly different backgrounds with common political catchwords and notions of history. The scholarly worm has turned. Recently, scholars like Meyer Reinhold and Caroline Winterer have compellingly demonstrated the ways in which classical knowledge did much more: it actively motivated and energized revolutionary movements (Reinhold 1984, Winterer 2002, 15–21; cf. Wood 1991, 100–2, 205–16).

To date, however, the revised intellectual and cultural history of revolutionary classicism has largely concentrated on the common identity and positive values it provided. As Gordon Wood says, in the English-speaking world through the early nineteenth century, “one did not have to be a professed republican or radical whig . . . to believe in virtue and the other classical values that accompanied it,” particularly as conveyed by Roman texts (Wood 1991, 105). Strange as it may seem to the postmodern reader, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, one could be a lover of Cicero’s republican values and at the same time an ardent royalist. In this view, classicism and particularly its political expression, classical republicanism, represent clear goods such as moderation, public morality, and civic virtue, and any tension stoked by classical discourse had mainly to do with relevance. Critics like the Pennsylvania revolutionary Benjamin Rush argued that classical learning should be replaced in the new nation by subjects more appropriate for an expanding modern empire: science, technology, and the study of modern languages (Reinhold 1984, 25). Though this was ignored at the time, scholars now point out that classical education was used to justify hierarchical divisions of class, gender, and race, since Latin and Greek and classical history were not taught to most working-class and poor men, women, and people of color—but recognizing their social capital and intellectual value, members of these groups fought tirelessly for access to them (Winterer 2007, Cook and Tatum 2010).

This view, this privileging of the constructive ideas and common identity that classical learning putatively incorporates in some while it is withheld from others, is only partial, and if we want a fuller understanding of the period and its use of the past, misleadingly so. The associations of classical texts with action at the extremes of human capacity, violence, and death are at least as enduring and important. In the public and private discourse of the period, memories of Rome

spurred people to rebellion—to take action against monarchy. When Josiah Quincy ordered his friends to act “Brutus-like” (cited in Shalev 2009, 24), he wanted them to imitate Rome’s tradition of violence in the service of liberty. To grasp the full significance of the appropriation of Roman texts and ideas in the revolutionary context, we need to consider the revolutionaries’ use of the classical past as a strategy of promoting resistant violence and providing a model of civic action in new conditions of potentially radical politics—keeping in mind that all this was occurring in the context of an emerging unprecedented level of egalitarianism in social and economic relations among white men (and some others; see Wood 1991, 124–45, 271–86). As Eran Shalev says in his study of the influence of classicism on revolutionary conceptions of time, the Greek and Roman past gave Americans “the courage to rebel; at the same time, it proscribed them from certain courses of action and swayed them toward others” (2009, 3).

Attention to the attractions of extremity, violence, and death in the colonial revolutionaries’ appropriation of Rome reveals fractures in their emancipatory struggle. Rome’s legitimacy both empowers and hobbles revolution. The colonial American intense desire to recreate Rome and the rage against that desire felt by opponents of their revolution offer us insight into the psychological mechanisms of political change and the particular challenges that arose in the course of establishing a version of liberal democracy in a society in transition. These stances also shed light on how political change shapes the always-evolving term, “Rome.”

In her famous and controversial study of revolution, Hannah Arendt concentrates on the radical sense of new beginnings that suffuses the eighteenth century, which she locates in the period’s unprecedented coincidence of political thought and experience. For the first time in history, she argues, the abstract idea of freedom was accompanied by the experience of creating the conditions of freedom and further, of being free.

These two things together—a new experience which revealed man’s capacity for novelty—are at the root of the enormous pathos which we find in both the American and the French revolutions, this ever-repeated insistence that nothing comparable in grandeur and significance had ever happened in the whole recorded history of mankind. (Arendt 1963, 29)²

² Contrast Coole’s claim that revolution is born from “acts of negation: refusal, resistance, revolt, subversion, transgression, criticism, non-cooperation, and so on” (2007, 142).

By “pathos,” a word she returns to several times in *On Revolution*, Arendt means both a sense of experience stretched to extremes, and a tragic self-awareness of the human perspective, that mixture of awe and apprehension felt in the contemplation of mortal smallness against the massive forces of historical time. Her insight into the significance of pathos is also the unstated context for her speculations about the powerful influence of Vergil on the founders’ thinking about new beginnings (1963, 205–14).

Colonial revolutionaries expressed their engagement with Roman texts and ideas in various allusions, analyses, and performances: they imitated their most famous speeches, used Roman names like “Brutus” and “Cato” as pseudonyms in the press, and cited Cicero and Sallust in legal cases and constitutional debates. Through Arendt’s provocative use of “pathos” to describe the revolutionary sensibility, I will explore a single aspect of the many-faceted appropriation of Rome by the early American revolutionaries. One of their most compelling and popular deployments of Roman history is the heroic exemplum, which sustains the myth of American self-sovereignty that persists to this day. The political theorist Wendy Brown has persuasively shown how political projects organized around change, whether utopian, aspirational, or reformist, can inadvertently preserve parts of the structures and effects they aim to replace (Brown 1995, ix). What compels me to reflect on the American revolutionaries is the fact that they embrace the past even as they insist on the sublime, world-changing novelty of their undertaking. Their appropriation of Rome, the paradigmatic errant republic—and just as importantly, the extravagant style of that appropriation—weaves tragic and utopian impulses into their political vision. At the same time, their turn to the Roman past is characterized as errant by skeptical contemporaries. The primary error of Roman ideas and values—Rome’s original sin, as it were—becomes inextricably entangled with the secondary error of reception itself.

Revolutionary Pathos

In 1772, Dr. Joseph Warren stood before a restive crowd in the Old South Meeting House in Boston, having been chosen, like Pericles, to speak in commemoration of the men killed in the so-called “Boston Massacre” of 1770. His speech was wildly popular. In 1775, not long before he died in

the Battle of Bunker Hill, Warren would deliver a new version of the Massacre oration. He was the only orator to be invited to speak twice at this event—the second time, wearing a gleaming white toga over his breeches. The 1772 speech works on the conceit that Warren speaks in the tradition of Roman orators to commemorate the dead and to defend the rights of American colonial subjects to secure representation in the British legislature. He opens by quoting in Latin Aeneas' comment at the beginning of *Aeneid* 2, which introduces the hero's rehearsal of loss in a state of pathos: *quis talia fando / Myrmidonum, Dolopumve, aut duri miles Ulyssei, / temperet a lacrymis* ("Who, what Myrmidon or Dolopian, or soldier of harsh Ulysses, in saying such things, can refrain from tears?" *Aen.* 2.6–8; Warren 1772, 3). The speech recalls Peter Brooks's description of melodrama as a form that seeks to create its own version of reality (Brooks 1976, 14–15). From the start, Warren invites the audience to play the role of ancient warrior, tying the expression of civic sentiment with the will to do violence on behalf of the republic.

His references to Rome exploit what we might call the utility of dramatic spectacle, allowing speaker and audience to contemplate the values Warren defends at a theatrically exciting distance. They also unlock an extravagance of language that enacts and exemplifies Warren's call on his audience to *feel* together, to indulge in virtuous sentiment that will bind them together as a collective. He identifies sentiment as the foundation of virtue in terms that allow for no ambiguity. The ancient Romans cultivated a "noble attachment" to a "free constitution" that raised them to a "bright summit of happiness and glory," and when they lost that constitution they were "plunged . . . into the black gulf of infamy and slavery" (Warren 1772, 6). In keeping with his traditional education, which included training in classical oratory, Warren would have made good use of the iconic power of gestures to lend the gravity of history to his words, which cast virtuous republican Rome as the ancestor of the American colonies and its corrupt imperial incarnation as the model for the British crown:

It was this attachment which inspired her senators with wisdom; it was this which glowed in the breasts of her heroes; it was this which guarded her liberties, and extended her dominions, gave peace at home, and commanded respect abroad; and when this . . . degenerated into tyrants and oppressors, her senators forgetful of their dignity, and seduced by base corruption, betrayed their country; her soldiers, regardless of their relation to the community, and urged only by hopes of plunder and rapine, unfeelingly committed the most flagrant enormities; and

hired to the trade of death, with relentless fury they perpetrated the most cruel murders, whereby the streets of imperial Rome were drenched with her noblest blood—Thus this empress of the world lost her dominions abroad, and her inhabitants, dissolute in their manners, at length became contented slaves; and she stands to this day, the scorn and derision of nations, and a monument of this eternal truth, that PUBLIC HAPPINESS DEPENDS ON A VIRTUOUS AND UNSHAKEN ATTACHMENT TO A FREE CONSTITUTION (1772, 6–7).

On the whole, not only does Warren radically misrepresent Roman values as they are generally understood today, but he glosses over what was viewed by many of his own contemporaries as the core error of the Romans' own self-referential nostalgia: the disdain of commerce and the scientific and social power that it creates. With his elevated, extravagant style, dotted by superlatives, Warren represents authentic commitment to liberty in the language of extremes: "bright summit," "black gulf," "most flagrant," "most cruel," "relentless," "unshaken." The pathos of Rome's decline, a state that Warren suggests is the British empire's future, transforms the contemporary situation into a moral melodrama, where the only response to the great historical forces that brought about decline is individual heroic action.

Appropriately, then, Warren brings the speech to a climax with a reference to Lucretia's suicide:

THE FATAL FIFTH OF MARCH, 1770, CAN NEVER BE FORGOTTEN. The horrors of THAT DREADFUL NIGHT are but too deeply impressed on our hearts—Language is too feeble to paint the emotions of our souls, when our streets were stained with the BLOOD OF OUR BRETHREN; when our ears were wounded by the groans of the dying, and our eyes were tormented with the sight of the mangled bodies of the dead. When our alarmed imagination presented to our view our houses wrapt in flames, our children subjected to the barbarous caprice of the raging soldiery; our beauteous virgins exposed to all the insolence of unbridled passion; our virtuous wives, endeared to us by every tender tie, falling a sacrifice to worse than brutal violence, and perhaps, like the famed LUCRETIA, distracted with anguish and despair, ending their wretched lives by their own fair hands (1772, 12–13).

His language gains in intensity when he invites his audience to imagine their losses ("the BLOOD OF OUR BRETHREN," in the original type-face). He characterizes these losses as an opportunity for the exercise of heroic self-sacrifice. Losing home, children, sisters, daughters, and wives proves the cost and thus the value of the revolutionary cause, while the allusion to Lucretia lends it historical legitimacy and a sense of grand

destiny. Warren closes the speech with an elaborate picture of his audience's rustic forefathers as the embodiments of Cincinnatus, who "with one hand broke the stubborn glebe, with the other grasped their weapons." He exhorts them, if they "really prefer the lonely cottage (blest with liberty) to gilded palaces," to assume the "legacy" of courage and virtue their fathers have "transmitted" to them and to fight for the free agrarian paradise they have inherited (1772, 17). In the 1775 oration, Warren returns to the paradox of the individual hero dying for the community's sake when he takes the audience into the field of battle, telling them to imagine themselves dying to redeem their country: "YOU CRY, the GLORIOUS WORK IS DONE. Then drop the mantle to some Elisha, and take your seats with kindred spirits in your native skies" (Warren 1775, 23). Just as in his 1772 invocation of Aeneas in tears for his dead comrades, this image of the audience's own assumption into a kind of Christian Olympus juxtaposes the revolutionary exemplar of self-sacrifice with the hero's fraternal relations with his fellows.

Self-sacrifice is a topic regularly elaborated in exaggerated terms by Warren's contemporaries' attempts to establish the extraordinary status of their political resistance to the British crown in the public speech of sermons and broadsheets and the private discourse of letters. Samuel Adams's note to his friend John Scollay is typical of the period's style: "The Self-Denial of the Citizens of Boston, their Patience and long Suffering under the cruel Oppression of the Port bill, was astonishing both to their Friends and their Enemies" (2011, 365). John Adams uses this rhetoric in an April 1776 letter to his friend Mercy Otis Warren, who later wrote a sensationalistic melodrama called "The Sack of Rome" (1790) as well as two neo-Roman propaganda plays that cloaked Massachusetts politics in "Roman" names ("Rapatio" for Governor Hutchinson, "Brutus" for her brother James Otis, and so forth). Adams expanded on his cousin Samuel's contrast between private and public suffering. "There must be a positive Passion for the public good, the public Interest, Honour, Power and Glory, established in the Minds of the People, or there can be no Republican Government, nor any real Liberty: and this public Passion must be Superiour to all private Passions" (1917, 222–3).

As Adams develops his argument, self-sacrifice takes on an explicitly self-wounding aspect. The passive voice (there must be a passion "established in the minds") turns to active. A republic is rendered strong, secure, and just, he says, only when each citizen commits to "seriously

set himself to root out his Passions, Prejudices, and Attachments . . . They must be happy to sacrifice their private pleasures, passions, and interests,” living lives exemplifying “the only reputable Principle and Doctrine . . . that all Things must give Way to the public” (Adams 1917, 223). Public sovereignty demands sacrifice, a radical yielding, a self-abandonment, even to the physicalized work of “rooting out,” which suggests individual self-mutilation. This resonates with the way Adams later expresses his frustrations with American military efforts, which mount fantasies of collective sacrifice: “Flight was unknown to the Romans . . . I wish it was to the Americans,” John Adams wrote after the American retreat from Canada (Shalev 2009, 25).

The call for a Roman style of sacrificial death informs many core revolutionary texts that were imitated and re-performed through the nineteenth century. “You remember, sir, the conclusion of this speech, so often declaimed in various ways by schoolboys,” John Roane told an acquaintance. Roane was referring to Patrick Henry’s speech to the Virginia Convention in 1775, which cited Addison’s call for “liberty or death” in his famous play *Cato*. Henry delivered the speech while pretending his arms were shackled, looking, observer John Roane recalled, “like Laocöon in a death struggle with coiling serpents” or “a Roman senator defying Caesar, while the unconquerable spirit of Cato of Utica flashed from every feature” (Roane in Henry 1891, 170). Just over ten years later, in November 1787, Thomas Jefferson would write to Colonel William Stephens Smith from Paris that frequent rebellions were the only tools that could perfect the state, since human laws would never be perfect: “the tree of liberty must be refreshed, from time to time, with the blood of patriots and tyrants. It is its natural manure” (discussed by Arendt 1963, 233–4). A further step is taken in Robespierre’s famous 1794 speech to the French National Convention, in which he argues that the body politic itself must be mutilated in order to preserve itself. Liberty requires terror, the sword, even despotism.

If the spring of popular government in time of peace is virtue, the springs of popular government in revolution are at once virtue and terror: virtue, without which terror is fatal; terror, without which virtue is powerless. Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible; it is therefore an emanation of virtue; it is not so much a special principle as it is a consequence of the general principle of democracy applied to our country’s most urgent needs.

It has been said that terror is the principle of despotic government. Does your government therefore resemble despotism? Yes, as the sword that gleams in the hands of the heroes of liberty resembles that with which the henchmen of tyranny are armed. Let the despot govern by terror his brutalized subjects; he is right, as a despot. Subdue by terror the enemies of liberty, and you will be right, as founders of the Republic. The government of the revolution is liberty's despotism against tyranny.

Driving these exhortations and their extreme style lies the revolutionaries' constant appeal to the myth of the heroic Roman, whose commitment to virtue expressed itself in a form of self-control so perfect that in its most extreme form, it extended to mastery over the end of mortal life, leading to the sacrifice of the self for the good of the community. The self-sovereign Roman self-denier or suicide (sometimes taking the form of a suicide mission where death is inevitable) is the hero of Joseph Addison's 1712 play *Cato* and Jacques-Louis David's paintings *The Lictors Bring to Brutus the Bodies of His Sons* (1789) and *The Oath of the Horatii* (1784). Not only Joseph Warren, but Patrick Henry and a host of other orators were compared to Cato, Brutus, even Laocöon. He (and sometimes she) has a long life, appearing in novels like *Ben-Hur*, and into the twentieth century, in post-war films like *The Robe*, *Ben-Hur*, and *Gladiator*. In most of these examples, the hero gets entangled with the narratives of Calvary and Protestant Puritan self-denial (Malamud 2009, 122–49).

The exemplar of heroic Roman self-sovereignty has clear instrumental value. In times of revolution, the desire for political change is born out of a sense of grievance, interference, injury, and oppression. As a rhetorical tactic, invoking the Roman hero allows the revolutionary to charge up the argument, to claim the moral high ground, to transform grievance into aspiration. Also instrumentally, the Roman hero sets up a competition between past and present, compelling the present audience to measure up against and even surpass the past. Ideologically speaking, the moralistic power of the hero overshadows, conceals, and helps disavow the role of commerce and property in the revolutionary narrative, bracketing skeptical questions about how political equality is supposed to operate in the absence of equality of property.

But these instrumental explanations do not fully account for the pathos of the representation. The heroes in question, after all—Brutus, Lucretia, the younger Cato, Cicero—are figures of extremity, suffering,

and death. The combination of immortal achievement and mortal fate both advances and contains the self-avowed emancipatory aims of revolutionary practice.

Five civilians were killed and six injured by the British soldiers in the civil disorder Warren was commemorating, and as he admits later in the speech, the soldiers were acquitted of any wrongdoing (though he warns they will ultimately “stand at the bar of an omniscient judge”). This does not prevent him from treating the killings as the proper spur of all-out revolution: a perfect example of Arendtian pathos, the insistence on extremes, that “nothing is comparable in grandeur and significance” to the subject at hand. The spectacle of suffering polarizes debate. Its simplistic moral legibility casts action against the British empire as heroic by a legendary Roman standard, and as the new rebellious movement takes on the trappings of Roman heroism, it gains the political advantage of heroism: it frees itself from accountability. A hierarchy lurks here, with the rhetoric of extremity serving to exclude groups like women and slaves believed to lack the capacity to suffer in the right ways, and ultimately to limit those groups’ access to and capacity for freedom.

Extremity also evokes the sense of impossibility. Adorno, less optimistic than Arendt about the power of novelty, remarks on “the cryptic inaccessibility of the new,” and his comment prods us to view the revolutionaries’ turn to Rome as a self-reining, a turn away from the present into a past that they know is impossible to reach (Adorno 1998, 20). The extremity of their rhetoric conveys their longing to bring something that was great and long lost back into the world, but at the same time anticipates failures.

In summoning up the extreme virtue of a Lucretia or a Cincinnatus, the revolutionaries call for a commitment to liberty that demands more than self-control: it leads to abjection, figured in the punitive rhetoric of self-wounding we saw in Adams’s letter, where self-interest is “rooted out” and replaced with “giving way” to the collective other. What aspect of revolutionary political psychology does this figure reveal? In her critique of twentieth-century identity politics, Brown explores the appeal of the wounded or unjustly treated subject as the site of civic attachments. To her, this figure embodies *ressentiment*, the moralizing revenge of the powerless populace, the “triumph of the weak as weak,” where the injury becomes the problematic site of identification, replacing political goals and purposes (Brown 1995, 41, 67). In the tense, uncertain course of revolution, a time Arendt calls the “hiatus” between “the no-longer

and the not-yet,” attachments to extreme self-sacrifice enable endgame fantasies and permit the evasion of political questions beyond the field of conflict (Arendt 1963, 205). In the revolutionaries’ errant recuperation of the Roman hero, we see a politics of anticipated paralysis, a proto-libertarian tendency to reproach and disdain organized state power instead of seizing it, a ready-made anticipatory acceptance of revolutionary failure and decline. Heroicizing failure, the suicidal or self-wounding hero shunts it off to the realm of memory and memorialization, placing the cause past recovery. At the same time, it makes the cause ever-new.

Finally, the spectacular nature of Warren’s representation of Roman virtue addresses one of the knottiest challenges facing eighteenth-century political thinkers: the relations of the individual and the collective. Mere everyday style cannot accommodate the fantasy of individual heroic action, just as society cannot accommodate its realization. In the society the revolutionaries sought to create, individual achievement and collective solidarity lived in tension. This tension was never to be resolved but rather lived around and with, as (mostly white male) citizens of the new nation embraced a commercial ethos that rewarded individual effort at the expense of collective identity. It is precisely around these relations that some of the earliest criticisms of the revolutionary use of Rome emerge.

Liberal Rejection

Let me turn now to the complex liberal reaction to the revolutionary recuperation of Roman extremity. Hobbes captures its main themes in a famous passage of *Leviathan*:

And as to Rebellion in particular against Monarchy; one of the most frequent causes of it, is the Reading of the books of Policy, and Histories of the antient Greeks, and Romans; from which, young men, and all others that are unprovided of the Antidote of solid Reason, receiving a strong, and delightfull impression, of the great exploits of warre, atchieved by the Conductors of their Armies, receive withall a pleasing Idea, of all they have done besides; and imagine their great prosperity, not to have proceeded from the aemulation of particular men, but from the vertue of their popular form of government: Not considering the frequent Seditions, and Civill Warres, produced by the imperfection of their Policy. (Ch. 29; Hobbes 1996, 225–6)

Hobbes gazes with contempt at the young and irrational men whose passive reception of the “great exploits” of the past spurs on action in the

present. They ride a cascade of errors. They fall in love with heroic extremity. They misread past deeds as the products of constitutional structure rather than individual virtue; and these deeds are themselves errors, spawn of “imperfect” Roman policy. Classical examples cause more error: in the following paragraph Hobbes declares that readers of Greek and Roman texts fall into the fallacy that subjects of a king are all slaves, through “the strong, and delightfull impression” heroic stories leave. The pleasure of reception, derived both from the deeds themselves (which Hobbes has already indicted) and the mode of their conveyance through text (which he contrasts to the “antidote of solid reason”), generates one more political error: the error of imitation. We will return to these errors of extremity, misreading, pleasure, and imitation.

In the age of the American and French revolutions, Benjamin Constant identifies Roman extremity as the primary source of the political error of ancient Rome and its latest would-be imitator, republican France. In the famous lectures he delivered in Paris in 1816, which set the freedom of the ancients against that of the moderns, Constant turns the revolutionaries’ valorization of Roman extremity on its head, attacking the “complete subjection of the individual to the authority of the community” (Constant 1988, 311). He anatomizes the individual citizen’s subjection to that authority, by which each is “constrained, watched, repressed . . . interrogated, dismissed, condemned, beggared, exiled, sentenced to death, deprived, stripped, banished, put to death” (1988, 311–12). Not simply the sacrifice of individual interest to the collective, but the extremity of it, the insistence on the absolute and the abstraction of the movement from individual and private to general and public, is the essence of Roman error.

We see how this plays out in Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, where Hegel contrasted the Roman spirit with the “exhilaration” of the Greeks, when “Spirit had not yet drawn back into abstraction; it was still involved with the Natural element—the idiosyncrasy of individuals.” In Rome, Hegel says, “abstract Freedom . . . sets an abstract state, a political constitution and power, over concrete individuality,” and creates the concept of “the inherent freedom of the abstract Ego,” a new subjectivity emerges: a “retreating into one’s self which we have observed is the corruption of the Greek Spirit.” While Rome possesses a certain “greatness,” that is, “stern inflexibility in the union of individuals with the State,” “the fundamental relations of ethics are demoralized . . . dull [and] stupid” (Hegel 1914, 279, 287, 290).

But Constant is not entirely unsympathetic to the French revolutionaries' infatuation with the Roman past.

God forbid that I should reproach them too harshly. Their error itself was excusable. One could not read the beautiful pages of antiquity, one could not recall the actions of its great men, without feeling an indefinable and special emotion, which nothing modern can possibly arouse. The old elements of a nature, one could almost say, earlier than our own, seem to awaken in us in the face of these memories. It is difficult not to regret the time when the faculties of man developed along an already trodden path, but in so wide a career, so strong in their own powers, with such a feeling of energy and dignity. Once we abandon ourselves to this regret, it is impossible not to wish to imitate what we regret.

(Constant 1988, 317)

To Constant, Roman error is self-propagating by virtue of its marvelous beauty and the emotions beauty summons up in its observers. The theme of self-loss becomes visible in his language. To admire Rome is to admire self-denial and to engage in what Constant sees as a "self-abandonment": "we abandon ourselves" to the regret of the loss of "energy and dignity," when the faculties of man were at their youthful height.

His choice of words in this passage signifies more than nostalgia. Constant shows that reading about the exemplary Romans in an imitative mode, imagining oneself as a republican Roman, becomes the means of experiencing a fantasy state. But now one occupies an "indefinable and special" place: belonging yet no longer belonging, identifying but not identical. The fact that one can and people have modeled themselves on Rome means that Rome is uncannily capable of traveling beyond itself: the beauty of its exemplars makes it portable, transferable. And so, Constant's language suggests, for citizens trying to refound a stable, virtuous state, the act of imitation unsettles the putative virtues of constancy, simplicity, and purity that the revolutionaries are trying to revive, even as it provides a means of expressing the deepest desires of "great" Romans to be remembered forever, to be exemplars.

Constant's sympathy, his comment that the revolutionaries' error was "excusable," also protects and idealizes the Roman republic while it subconsciously registers that Rome continually transgresses its own temporal and geographical boundaries, precisely by becoming an exemplar—something that dangerously transcends history. Out of the awareness of Rome's excess, created not only by its own power over the course of a particular historical era but also by its transmission as a memory, grows Constant's anxious critique of the extremity of Roman virtue.

To Constant, the revolutionaries' reception of Rome constitutes a tragic political allegory. From our distance, we can see that in the dialectic created by the error of the revolutionaries who seek to re-enact Roman extremity and the error of Constant's liberal reaction to them, there is reflected the core error of modern liberalism: its inability to adequately resolve the vexed question of the relationship between individual and the community. Constant is famous for his defense of "negative" modern liberty, the freedom from interference, that he believes is characteristic of the modern commercial age. His free citizens live in private pursuits, content for the most part to live at a distance from politics. Civic exemplars, romantic and appealing, embody an "energy" that Constant desires even as he struggles to figure their place in his thinking. It is worth remembering that Rome's dominance as a political and ethical model in the late eighteenth century coincides with the emergence, on the one hand, of an array of theories of political perfectionism (notably utopian socialists like Charles Fourier, Saint-Simon, and Robert Owen) and of the modern culture of individuality. "I am not made like any one I have been acquainted with, perhaps like no one in existence," Jean-Jacques Rousseau observes at the beginning of his *Confessions*, "if not better, I am at least different." We can see how the Roman hero-type must have seemed both fodder and antithesis to these views.

Conservative Horror

In 1790, Edmund Burke watched the French revolution unfold:

Your legislators seem to have taken their opinions of all professions, ranks, and offices from the declamations and buffooneries of satirists; who would themselves be astonished if they were held to the letter of their own descriptions. By listening only to these, your leaders regard all things only on the side of their vices and faults, and view those vices and faults under every colour of exaggeration. It is undoubtedly true, though it may seem paradoxical; but in general, those who are habitually employed in finding and displaying faults are not only unfurnished with patterns of the fair and good, but by habit they come to take no delight in the contemplation of those things. By hating vices too much, they come to love men too little. It is, therefore, not wonderful that they should be indisposed and unable to serve them. From hence arises the complexional disposition of some of your guides to pull everything in pieces. At this malicious game they display the whole of their quadrimanous activity. As to the rest, the paradoxes of eloquent writers, brought forth purely as a sport of fancy to try their talents, to rouse attention

and excite surprize, are taken up by these gentlemen, not in the spirit of the original authors, as means of cultivating their taste and improving their style. These paradoxes become with them serious grounds of action upon which they proceed in regulating the most important concerns of the state. Cicero ludicrously describes Cato as endeavoring to act in the commonwealth upon the school paradoxes which exercised the wits of the junior students in the Stoic philosophy. If this was true of Cato, these gentlemen copy after him in the manner of some persons who lived about his time—*pede nudo Catonem*. Mr. Hume told me that he had from Rousseau himself the secret of this principle of composition. That acute though eccentric observer had perceived that to strike an interest in the public the marvelous must be produced; that the marvelous of the heathen mythology had long since lost its effect; that the giants, magicians, fairies, and heroes of romance which succeeded had exhausted the portion of credulity which belonged to their age; that nothing was left to the writer but that species of the marvelous which might still be produced, and with as great an effect as ever, though in another way; that is, the marvelous in life, in manners, in characters and in extraordinary situations, giving rise to new and unlooked-for strokes in politics and morals. I believe that were Rousseau alive and in one of his lucid intervals, he would be shocked at the practical phrenzy of his scholars, who in their paradoxes are servile imitators, and even in their incredulity discover an implicit faith. (2009, 171–2)

In this rich passage, Burke's reflections on the French revolution take Hobbes's and Constant's insights into the role of imitation, pleasure, and extremes back to the problem of novelty. Burke criticizes the revolutionaries' "servile" imitative qualities: they are "declaimers and buffoons" whose extremist stance leads them into outrageous hypocrisy. The Roman error of imitation, figured here by the imitators of Cato, *pede nudo*, causes modern imitators to fall into another putative Roman failing, the errors of exaggeration, inauthenticity, and misreading. Burke recalls Cicero's representation of Cato: misinterpreting past examples of virtue, Cato constructs artificial rules by which to guide his actions. Cato's imitators compound the error. Burke conveys deep anxiety and rage at the transformation of mastery of classical knowledge into a dangerous game of political experimentation. Shot through with longing for the "correct" version of Rome and repulsion at its deformation, Burke's critique is almost sadistic in its intensity—matching the revolutionaries' masochistic appropriation of destructively self-denying self-sovereignty (Gelder 2006, 110–11).

Burke comments ironically on the failure of the revolutionaries to understand their own father figure, Rousseau, who grasps the need to

appeal to the public sense of the marvelous, and treats this as a matter not just of thinking but “in life, in manners, in characters and in extraordinary situations, giving rise to new and unlooked-for strokes in politics and morals.” Though the revolutionaries’ excessive Catonian rules of stern self-denial and the hypocrisy that results (“leaders regard vices and faults under every habit of exaggeration...and would be astonished to be held to the letter of their own description”) blind them to the very power they seek to unleash, he acknowledges the capacity of the marvelous Roman example. He sees, that is, the way Roman virtue can connect with members of the public and strike their interest, inspiring citizens to recreate the past and simultaneously to create something fresh and new in politics. If as a conservative thinker he is unsettled by the phenomenon, Burke understands the paradoxical capacities of imitative language and practice, for good and for bad, to instill novelty in the world.

Like Hobbes and Constant, Burke is suspicious of the way Roman examples inspire action through the corporeal sensation of drama. The French and American revolutionaries he targets sought to strengthen their own claim to belong to a sovereign history, an association with imperial power, through their mobilization of images and narratives that make their audiences feel the pathos of the Roman past together. Burke’s rejection of this use of the Roman tradition allows him to define political thought and its “proper” fields or matters of concern: as innovation rather than imitation; concerned with reasons rather than matters aesthetic or rhetorical; as disembodied rather than corporeal. Burke’s evaluation of Roman error is part of a larger narrative of selection and erasure in modern political theory.

So far I have aimed to show that in the extravagant emotional register of revolutionary rhetoric and its critics, the errant Roman body politic at once inspires, legitimates, excuses, and constrains the struggle for freedom—and further, that Roman error is impossible to untangle from the error of reception. With their passionate investment in heroic Roman ideals, the revolutionaries (and the notion of revolution itself) become vulnerable to charges of irrationality, fantasy, servility, imitativeness, and self-abandonment—not just because the revolutionaries are erroneously invested in an errant past, but because reception itself is error: irrational, servile, imitative, and—because anchoring oneself in the past means a certain dislocation from the present—self-abandoning. In the modern

political context, the extreme Roman hero is not an exemplary articulation of norms or normativity, but an expression of desire for change that threatens to unleash the most violent impulses of the wronged—and at the same time, whose radical consequences are automatically foreclosed by the weight of elite tradition (see further Lowrie 2015, 7).

I want to close with the generation prior to Burke, with the turn in England and Scotland to remaking of the Roman legacy in ways that emphasized the connections and similarities between people. A thinker like Adam Smith, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, sees in Cicero a model of virtue radically different from the self-denying Cato:

In imagination we become the very person whose actions are represented to us: we transport ourselves in fancy to the scenes of those distant and forgotten adventures, and imagine ourselves acting the part of a Scipio. (2.5.3) Cicero, in the times of the highest Roman politeness, could, without degrading himself, weep with all the bitterness of sorrow in the sight of the whole senate and the whole people; as it is evident he must have done in the end of almost every oration. The orators of the earlier and ruder ages of Rome could not probably, consistent with the manners of the times, have expressed themselves with so much emotion. It would have been regarded, I suppose, as a violation of nature and propriety in the Scipios, in the Leliuses, and in the elder Cato, to have exposed so much tenderness to the view of the public. Those ancient warriors could express themselves with order, gravity, and good judgment; but are said to have been strangers to that sublime and passionate eloquence which was first introduced into Rome, not many years before the birth of Cicero, by the two Gracchi, by Crassus, and by Sulpitius. This animated eloquence, which has been long practised, with or without success, both in France and Italy, is but just beginning to be introduced into England (5.2.10)

These “orators of the earlier and ruder ages of Rome” are examples of the kind of autonomous delimited self-mastery whose identity as object of fantasy I discussed earlier. But as Smith works through his analysis of the power of speech, he returns to his main argument: that good moral judgment occurs in the space between sovereign selves, and that our imagination is key to traveling the distance between selves. This explains the last sentence in the passage above, where readers “in imagination . . . become the very person whose actions are represented to us: we transport ourselves in fancy to the scenes of those distant and forgotten adventures, and imagine ourselves acting the part of a Scipio.”

Smith’s interest leads us back to pathos, and suggests the deep importance Roman political thinking about sentiment and corporeality held for

the eighteenth century. If this strand of Roman reception fails to dominate the evolving discourse of political thought in the West, it never quite vanishes entirely either. It finds its roots in Renaissance writings like Baldesar Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano*, "The Book of the Courtier," a book that itself developed out of the tradition of late medieval handbooks of classical rhetoric. These handbooks started from the classical rhetorical maxim that "as a man speaks, so he is," and they gradually blurred rules about persuasive, artful letter-writing and speech-giving into rules about communication writ large: how to talk with a person of a higher or lower station, how to dress, how to gesture, even how to be spontaneous. From the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries, in translated and adapted form, these classical handbooks reached a fast-growing audience among the aspiring members of the new middle classes in England, France, Germany, Italy, and the Americas.

They clear further room to consider how the revolutionaries' concentration on the suffering heroic body, alongside Smith's interest in sympathy, might contribute to a notion of freedom that does not seek to mount and defend the self-sovereign mastery still sought by contemporary philosophers: by recognizing one's imbrication in the world and one's body, and the role of imitation and acknowledgment in virtue. As both American and French revolutionaries believed, the main question in republican politics is who can speak, with what influence, and who is spoken for. Developing one's own voice is crucial. But speakers need listeners, and we can see a line connecting all these basic ideas about what politics is: the relation between people, filled by emotion and imagination, an appreciation of the aesthetic.

From the moment the Latin literary record begins in earnest, at the beginning of the first century BCE, this line is clear: it is a main preoccupation. We might go as far as to say that the crisis of the late republic both rendered crucial, and exposed the need for, careful reflection of the way people (especially but not only citizens) related to one another. Texts like Cicero's *De officiis* enshrine the most important term—more important, he says, than wisdom, justice, or courage—as *decorum*, that which is fitting; he took care to preserve his collection of letters, testimony to his relations with others. The Romans cultivated a form of adolescent education that trains teenaged boys to speak in the voices of others, in front of others. They created whole genres of poetry devoted to the relations of erotics (elegy), friends and acquaintances, poet and

patron (satire, epistle). All these genres animated the eighteenth-century age of revolutions, but experienced change and decline in the course of the nineteenth century.

Given this tradition, it may come as something of a surprise to remember that we live today among advocates of a liberal political theory that once again locates itself in the tradition of Roman freedom, where selves are sovereign masters of themselves. Over the last thirty years, a group of political theorists and intellectual historians, notably Philip Pettit, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli, have turned for inspiration to the Roman republic. Together they seek a “thicker” theory of freedom, more space for patriotic affect and collective memory and identification.

In response to Constant’s representation of Roman freedom and its extremist values, they draw on Roman historians like Chaim Wirszubski and Peter Brunt to argue that the Romans’ conception of freedom was broader than Constant allows. They point, for example, to Brunt’s conclusion that the right of Roman citizens not to be interfered with arbitrarily by magistrates is evidence that the Romans grasped and embraced a version of the modern concept of negative freedom as noninterference. Philip Pettit, in particular, turns Constant’s absolutes against him and reconstitutes Roman republicanism as a third way between communitarianism and liberalism. Republicanism becomes a new form of liberal freedom.

In his books *Republicanism* and *A Theory of Freedom*, and most recently *On the People’s Terms*, Pettit has argued that the Romans conceived of the freedom of the citizen as that which distinguished the free from the slave: the capacity to live not *in potestate domini* (“in the power of a master”) but free from even the possibility of domination by another. Pettit concludes that the three axial ideas he considers “Roman” are the conception of freedom as nondomination, the claim that this sort of freedom requires a body of law under which the polity aims to guarantee the common good, and the belief that institutions are a necessary element in the constitution.

Nondomination involves more than just being free from actual interference by other people at any given moment in time. Instead, it means being free from even the possibility of arbitrary interference by others. This is Cicero’s point when he says that “freedom consists not in having a just master, but in having none” (*Rep.* 2.43). Pettit defends his neo-Roman conception of freedom on the grounds that it captures the

breadth and depth of the injustice of various forms of unfreedom, including the intimidation of workers and women, better than the liberal definition of freedom as noninterference. His republican theory of freedom as nondomination proposes that slaves are unjustly, unacceptably unfree regardless of whether their masters are in fact benevolent or cruel, because even the slave of a noninterfering master lives according to the master's arbitrary whim (1997, 31–5). From this paradigmatic example, Pettit expands the ideal of nondomination to a range of other unfree relationships: the worker fearful of losing his job, the wife submissively obeying her dominating husband, the impoverished person subjected to the petty, intrusive supervision of a welfare worker.

As these examples suggest, Pettit's free self is autonomous, self-knowing, self-determining, and self-accounting. Isaiah Berlin summarized the essentials of this view and traced its roots in classical thought in his 1958 essay *Two Concepts of Liberty*:

I wish, above all, to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for my choices and able to explain them by reference to my own ideas and purposes. I feel free to the degree that I believe this to be true, and enslaved to the degree that I am made to realize that it is not...[F]reedom...consists in being one's own master. [It is not] the elimination of desires, but resistance to them, and control over them...I am free because, and in so far as, I am autonomous. (Berlin 1969, 131)

This self is enabled to govern itself by knowing itself in the consciousness of communal norms. The neo-republicans' work glosses the practice of virtue as a conviction that rational deliberation and habits of civility will provide the cure. The violent abjection of the Roman example is elided. Their construction of this new liberal philosophy as heir to the Roman tradition, while staying at a careful distance from Roman practices like slavery, allows them to define contemporary political philosophy in certain ways, or rather, as Burke had done, to reinforce an existing definition of political philosophy and its "proper" fields or matters of concern. Pathos has vanished, replaced by liberal optimism and its erasure of the tragic aspects of politics.

Conclusion

The American and French revolutionaries used the traditional Roman example to frame their emancipatory struggle, a struggle that many of

their contemporaries feared would never end, leaving the world permanently topsy-turvy, without roots or foundations. Along with novelty, they saw that citizens also need normalcy and permanence. Only the security of lasting institutions creates the space of appearance and allows people to share in the exercise of politics. “No civilization—the man-made artifact to house successfully generations—would ever have been possible without a framework of stability, to provide the wherein for the flux of change,” Arendt says (1972, 78). The world

needs such pillars in order to guarantee continuity and permanence, without which it cannot offer mortal men the relatively secure, relatively imperishable home they need . . . The world becomes inhuman, inhospitable to human needs—which are the needs of mortals—when it is violently wrenched into a movement in which there is no longer any sort of permanence. (1970, 11)

The revolutionaries’ question is: where do we discover new political ideas? If we draw them from the past, how do we make them our own? Must we remake their errors? These questions are still ours, and we find ourselves caught inside the revolutionaries’ paradox: to effect radical change in a resistant or uncertain populace, it seems practical to frame the change in the familiar terms of a common tradition (in this case, the image repertoire of the Roman republic). When that framing is attacked as imitative or servile, we are flung into the new, without the framework of stability tradition provides. The revolutionaries’ acts of reception, and the critiques I have briefly reviewed, disclose both desire for and fear of Rome—which is to say, we desire and fear political change.

From early modernity, popular representations of the Roman republic have revolved around the myth of the heroic Roman whose sovereignty over himself or herself led in its most extreme form to the act of sacrifice of self or family for the good of the community: Brutus, Lucretia, Curtius, Cato, and others. Extremity has been one of the main concerns of this essay—both the extremity of self-sacrifice that drew the American revolutionaries to Roman virtuous exemplars and the rhetorical extremes articulated in the critical reaction to the Roman tradition by liberal and conservative thinkers. I commented on Benjamin Constant’s and Edmund Burke’s critique of the excited pleasure revolutionaries take in imitating Roman exemplars. For Constant, reading the history of republican Rome becomes the uncanny means of experiencing a fantasy state where the errant fantasist occupies an “indefinable and special” place, belonging yet no longer belonging, identifying but not identical. Through

his own idealization (ironically imitative in its own right) Constant suggests that by becoming an exemplar, the Roman republic transcends or destroys history, and thus becomes a dangerous model for politics. Burke mocks the revolutionaries' "servile" imitative qualities. The old Roman error of imitation, as he describes it, seduces moderns deeper into Roman error. Constant's and Burke's critiques of pleasure, desire, and imitation in the transmission of political ideals over time constitute a displaced expression of core problems at the heart of liberal political thought and the political thought of modernity: how the liberal free autonomous self rules itself and relates to other, and how modern thought relates to the past.

5

Receptions of Rome in Debates on Slavery in the U.S.A.

Margaret Malamud

Arguments over the correct reception of ancient Rome played a vital role in debates over the burning issue of slavery in antebellum America. Opponents of chattel slavery pointed to the paradox of the classicizing rhetoric of the American Revolution and the words of the Declaration of Independence and the coexistence of the institution of slavery. They linked Roman decline to the institution of slavery, and by analogy, warned that just as slavery had led to the decline of Roman civilization so, too, did the institution of slavery threaten the health and future of the American republic. Abolitionists argued that slavery sapped Roman citizens' civic virtue, corrupted public morals, and enabled the barbarian invasions. For them, Rome was a flawed model for the new American republic rather than a shining model of political liberty. For slaveholding men and women there was no contradiction between their republican causes and owning slaves. Southern defenders of slavery, like James Henry Hammond, one-time governor and senator from South Carolina, claimed, "slavery is the corner-stone" and foundation of every well-designed and durable "republican edifice" (Hammond 1866, 126). He and other proslavery writers fished in the waters of ancient history to find evidence of the ubiquity of slavery and its role as a basic building block of civilized life. Proslavery Southerners argued that slavery in ancient Rome and in modern America was the *sine qua non* that enabled liberty and civilization. Slavery was a "positive good," and greed and

moral corruption (unrelated to slavery) were the causes of the decline of Rome. As this chapter will demonstrate, references to Roman slavery in arguments over modern slavery were abundant but not stable; their meanings shifted in accordance with the political and ideological positions of their producers.

I begin with a discussion of the metaphorical use of slavery to refer to political oppression in the rhetoric of the American Revolution. The revolutionaries regularly invoked the example of Cato the Younger and his fierce resistance to the death to the tyranny of Julius Caesar, whom they compared to King George III in their own passionate resistance to the “slavery” of the British monarchy. Abolitionists swiftly responded to what they perceived to be the flawed use of Roman references and they too appropriated Roman allusions to validate their own position on the evils of chattel slavery. I turn next to the frequent comparisons of the institution of slavery in ancient Rome to slavery in America in which opposing sides on the slavery divide found support for their radically different positions. In the next sections, I analyze the acrimonious disagreement between slaveholders and abolitionists on the effects of slavery on agriculture in ancient Rome and on the character of the Romans themselves and the implications that slavery might have for modern America. I end with a contemporary example of arguments over the correct reception of ancient Rome in matters relating to slavery and the interpretation of the meaning of the Civil War.

“Give Me Liberty Or Give Me Death.” (Patrick Henry, March 23, 1775)

The hand of fate is over us, and heaven
Exacts severity from all our thoughts:
It is now a time to talk aught
But chains or conquest, liberty or death.

(Joseph Addison, *Cato* II.IV.79–80)

In September 1777, the British army captured Philadelphia, defeating George Washington’s Continental Army. Through the long and difficult winter that followed, the demoralized troops camped out at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. The situation was dire and the physical discomforts the men endured during the winter were exhausting. By early May of 1778,

the weather finally improved. After long months of training under the Prussian Baron von Steuben, and as new recruits and supplies arrived, the ragged insurgent force was transformed into a disciplined fighting unit. Seeking to rally his troops for the new season of campaigns, General George Washington requested a performance of Joseph Addison's 1713 play *Cato*, confident in the tonic effect that Cato the Younger's clarion call to fight to the death for liberty would have on the army as it prepared to regroup and engage the British. Washington was not relying on novelty to invigorate his troops, nor was he an isolated commander out of touch with the tastes of his men. He was well aware that his fellow Americans defined themselves in relation not only to the British of the day, but also to the Romans of the past.

Cato was first performed in the American colonies in 1735 in Charleston, South Carolina, some twenty years after its opening performance in London.¹ Within a few decades, *Cato* had become the most popular play in pre-revolutionary America.² Its theme of liberty opposing tyranny clearly struck a chord in the nascent republic. Addison's play focuses on the last days of Cato's life and his suicide in Utica. The parallels between the desperate situation of Cato's men in the North African desert and the American army's trials during the winter of 1777 must have had special meaning for Washington and his men, who were living, not acting, the republicans' fierce embrace of liberty. Analogy with the virtuous Cato lifted the revolutionary soldiers' struggle to a grand or mythic level, and out of the misery of that bleak winter.

The exemplary qualities of the Roman tragedy were clear to Washington. Its hero, Cato, the charismatic Stoic who, almost from his death, was the very model of a patriotic hero, embodied the qualities most admired in eighteenth-century America: civic virtue, unselfish patriotism, and courage. Its antagonist, Julius Caesar, stood for their opposites: unchecked ambition and tyrannical oppression. Caesar was emblematic of tyranny,

¹ Joseph Addison's play was first performed in London in 1713. Addison wrote during a time of political upheaval and intense factional conflict between Whigs and Tories over political control. Addison was politically associated with the Whigs, "yet *Cato* is remarkable for the manner in which both Whigs and Tories embraced it as sympathetic to their causes; leaders of both parties were present at the opening performance, and Alexander Pope's account of the premiere describes Whigs and Tories competing to appropriate the play to their own causes" (Addison 2004, xiii).

² There were nine American editions of *Cato* before 1800 and eight more in the nineteenth century.

and resistance against tyranny even when hope of victory was gone, the central theme of Addison's play, resonated with Washington's army. His soldiers packed the playhouse to the doors.³

At the time of the American Revolution, Caesar was popularly represented as a tyrant whose ruthless ambition brought down the Roman republic. Colonists invoked Caesar's political opponents Brutus, Cassius, Cato, and Cicero as heroes in their own struggle against the British monarchy. The colonists made these Romans' struggle against Caesar analogous to their own struggle against the British crown, disparagingly referring to English government officials as "Caesars."⁴ Just as the Romans had resisted the tyranny of Caesar, preferring death to political slavery, so the revolutionaries of America preferred death to slavery under King George III. The metaphor of slavery that the revolutionaries employed to describe their political or economic oppression legitimated and inspired resistance to the British monarchy.

Abolitionists quickly seized upon what they perceived to be the flawed use of Rome in the rhetoric of the revolution (for other critiques of American revolutionaries' use of Rome, see Connolly's essay in this volume). In a Fourth of July oration delivered in Baltimore to the Maryland Society for the Promotion of the Abolition of Slavery in 1791, less than four years after the ratification of the Constitution, physician George Buchanan pointed to the paradox of the American Revolution and the continued existence of the institution of slavery: "What! Shall a people, who flew to arms with the valor of Roman citizens, when encroachments were made upon their liberties, by the invasion of foreign powers, now basely descend to cherish the seed and propagate the growth of the evil, which they boldly sought to eradicate?" (1873, 12). Buchanan was well aware that the revolutionary generation invoked Julius Caesar's political opponents as heroes in their own struggle against the British monarchy. But Buchanan resisted the slavery-as-metaphor trope, pointing instead to the hypocrisy of the coexistence of the American rhetoric of "liberty or death" and the enslavement of fellow human beings. Speaking directly to the founders, Buchanan admonished them to abolish slavery: "If your forefathers have been degenerate enough to introduce slavery into your country, to contaminate the

³ I have discussed *Cato* and Washington in more depth in Malamud 2009, 9–15.

⁴ For examples, see Richard 1994, 91.

minds of her citizens, you ought to have the virtue of extirpating it" (12). "Such are the effects of subjecting man to slavery," Buchanan argued, "that it destroys every human principle, vitiates the mind, instills ideas of unlawful cruelties, and subverts the springs of government" (11–12). Buchanan dedicated his oration to Thomas Jefferson and sent him a copy.

The Roman African

Employing a different classical Roman reference in a portrait of the leader of the 1839 *Amistad* slave revolt, Sengbe Pieh, the abolitionist artist Nathaniel Jocelyn dressed him in a toga (Figure 5.1), which connected him symbolically both to ancient Rome and to members of the revolutionary generation. Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century sculptors typically clad the Founding Fathers in classical dress to show their embrace of Roman republican values.

In 1839, slaves aboard a ship called the *Amistad* had revolted to secure their freedom while being transported from one Cuban port to another. The slaves had been kidnapped from the colony of Sierra Leone and sold to Spanish slavers. Their leader was Sengbe Pieh, a young Mende man, popularly known in the United States as Joseph Cinqué.⁵ The captured Mende people demanded that the slavers return them to Sierra Leone.

When a gale drove the ship northeast along the United States coastline and the *Amistad* was seized off Long Island, a reporter from the *New York Sun* witnessed Cinqué's defiance of his captors and his repeated attempts to escape. He dove from the ship and swam for forty minutes with the ship in pursuit. When he was finally hauled on board and manacled, he addressed his fellow mutineers. A Spanish cabin boy with some knowledge of African dialect translated his speech, which was recorded by the reporter from the *New York Sun*.

Friends and Brothers—We would have returned [to Africa] but the sun was against us. I could not see you serve the white man, so I induced you to help me kill the Captain. I thought I should be killed—I expected it. It would have been better. You had better be killed than live many moons in misery. I shall be hanged, I think every day. But this does not pain me. I could die happy if by dying I could save so many of my brothers from the bondage of the white man.

(Quoted in Alexander 1984, 37)

⁵ I have discussed Joseph Cinqué in Malamud 2011, 296–9.

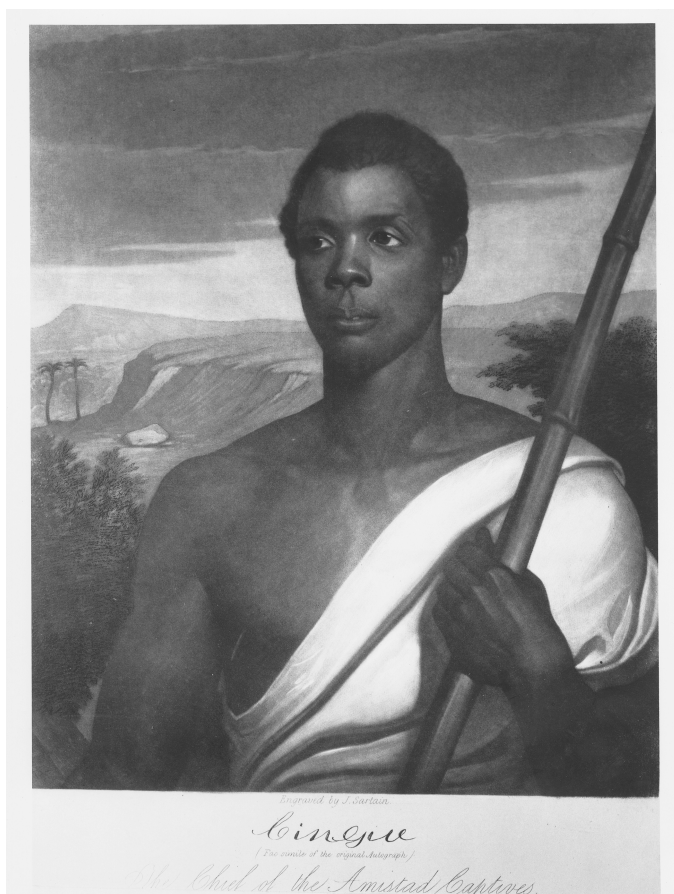


Figure 5.1 Sartain, John (1808–97). “Joseph Cinque: The Chief of the Amistad Captives.” After a portrait by Nathaniel Jocelyn, c.1841.

Photo credit: Art Resource, NY.

Northern abolitionists formed a committee to defend the African captives and John Quincy Adams pleaded the cause of the African captives before the United States Supreme Court. On March 9, 1841, the Supreme Court issued its final verdict in the Amistad Case—the captives were cleared of charges of murder and piracy. They were freed and they eventually returned to Africa.

While waiting for the outcome of the trial, wealthy black abolitionist Robert Purvis commissioned a portrait of Cinqué from the white abolitionist painter Nathaniel Jocelyn. Jocelyn depicted Cinqué as both an African and a classical hero who stares from the canvas with a proud and dauntless look. Jocelyn left out Cinqué's tattoos on his arms and chest and dressed him in traditional Mende dress—a white cloth draped his body leaving his right arm and shoulder bare, and holding a spear, a symbol of leadership. But, as Marcus Rediker has observed, "Jocelyn cleverly built double meanings into both: viewers of the painting might see the African leader as wearing a toga, like a virtuous Roman republican citizen, or as Moses, staff in hand, having led his compatriots back to the Promised Land" (Rediker 2012, 174–5). The white toga suggested that Cinqué's willingness to fight to the death for liberty embodied the virtues of Cato and other Roman republican heroes who preferred death to bondage.⁶ Jocelyn dared to paint Cinqué as a noble African, a radical departure from the usual demeaning ways Africans and African Americans were represented in art. In contrast to the dignity and strength of the leader of the revolt in Jocelyn's painting, Amasa Hewins's 1840 135-foot-wide canvas of *The Death of the Captain of the Amistad, Capt. Ferrer*, engraved by John W. Barber, in keeping with the stereotypes of the times, depicted the killing of the captain and crew as bestial and brutal acts committed by barbarous Africans.

Purvis cherished the portrait, which hung above his desk in the sitting room of his home in Philadelphia. He had artist and engraver John Sartain of Philadelphia make an engraving and lithograph of the painting in 1841 and affordable (\$2) copies were sold through the Pennsylvania Antislavery Association office ("Portrait of Cinqué," *Colored American*, February 27, 1841). The Amistad Africans saw a copy and were "delighted" by the likeness of Cinqué and by his "imposing" attitude in the portrait. When he saw his own image, Cinqué exclaimed, "[O]h, good, good" (quoted in Rediker 2012, 174). One proud owner of a mezzotint wrote in the *Colored American*,

We shall be proud to have our apartments graced with the portrait of the noble Cinqué, and shall regard it as a favor to our descendants, to transmit to them his

⁶ Cinqué's toga is a blend of ancient and tribal dress. Mendi tribesmen draped their bodies in cloth from three to four feet wide and from six to nine feet long, leaving the right arm and shoulder bare (Alexander 1984, 44).

likeness. And who that has any humanity in his heart, or any veneration for a HERO, and who has any knowledge of this case, would not like to have this likeness about them? ("Portrait of Cinqué," *Colored American*, February 27, 1841).

Frederick Douglass was another proud owner of a copy of Sartain's mezzotint, which he hung in his library at his home in the Anacostia neighborhood of Washington, D.C. (Gregory 1893, 208).

Some publications like the *Colored American* newspaper welcomed the connection between antiquity, the Founding Fathers, and the actions of the rebel slave:

This noble hero, by his defense of liberty, has placed himself side by side with Patrick Henry, John Hancock, Thomas Jefferson, and Samuel and John Adams fathers of the revolution. The justice of the nation has stood up in vindication of his deeds. How could they have done otherwise, with an example so illustrious as the American Revolution before them? ("Cinqué," *Colored American*, March 27, 1841)

And the *New York Sun* pointed out: "Had he lived in the days of Greece or Rome, his name would have been handed down to posterity as one who had practiced those most sublime of all virtues—disinterested patriotism and unshrinking courage."⁷ To some viewers, Jocelyn's portrait suggested that Cinqué embodied both the virtues of Cato and other ancient Roman republican heroes who preferred death to political slavery under Julius Caesar and the virtues of the revolutionary generation who resisted the "tyranny" of King George III. Cinqué's willingness to fight to the death to resist slavery, however, also gave a deeper, more basic meaning to the well-known rallying cry of the American Revolution, "Give me liberty, or give me death!" The painting of the toga-clad black man exposed the hypocrisy of the revolutionary rhetoric of liberty in the face of the institution of slavery. Or, to put it another way, the painting and its Roman allusions made clear the vast difference between chattel slavery and slavery as a metaphor for political bondage.

Other Americans were outraged at the linkage of Roman antiquity, the virtues of the revolutionary generation, and Africans. Many found the depiction of an African as a heroic warrior clad in Roman dress offensive. Jocelyn's painting was so controversial that it was banned from its inaugural showing; the Artists' Fund Society of Philadelphia refused to

⁷ Quoted in *The Amistad Revolt: An Historical Legacy of Sierra Leone and the United States*, <http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/soc/amistad.pdf>, 6.

show the portrait in its annual exhibition. Jocelyn promptly resigned his honorary membership (Alexander 1984, 32, 45). John Neagle, president of the Artists' Fund Society, returned the portrait to Purvis along with a letter in which he wrote that it was "contrary to usage to display work of that character, [and] believing that under the excitement of the times, it might prove injurious both to the proprietors and the institution." In response, abolitionist Henry Clarke Wright, a friend of Purvis, wrote a passionate letter to the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, a Philadelphia abolitionist newspaper, exposing the real reason the painting was not shown.

The plain English of it is, Cinque is a NEGRO. This is a Negro-hating and negro-stealing nation. A slaveholding people. The negro-haters of the north, and the negro-stealers of the south will not tolerate a portrait of a negro in a picture gallery. And such a negro! His dauntless look, as it appears on canvass, would make the souls of the slaveholders quake. His portrait would be a standing anti-slavery lecture to slaveholders and their apologists. To have it in the gallery would lead to discussions about slavery and the "inalienable" rights of man, and convert every set of visitors into an anti-slavery meeting. So "the hanging committee" bowed their necks to the yoke and bared their backs to the scourge, installed slavery as doorkeeper to the gallery, carefully to exclude every thing that can speak of freedom and inalienable rights, and give offence to men-stealers!! Shame on them!⁸

Purvis was more restrained in his criticism. He believed that the hanging committee rejected the portrait because Cinqué was a hero and "a black man has no right to be a hero" (Purvis quoted in Honour 1989, 161). And indeed, the *New York Morning Herald* insisted that Cinqué was a "blubber-lipped, sullen looking negro, not half as intelligent or striking in appearance as every third black you meet on the docks of New York."⁹ Furthermore, Africans were "a distinct and totally different race, and the God of nature never intended that they should live together in any other relation than that of master and slave."¹⁰ Jocelyn's painting of a noble black man—a Roman African, if you will, prepared to fight to the death for liberty—was too politically inflammatory to display.

⁸ Neagle and Wright letters published in "The Hanging Committee of the Artists' Fund Society Doing Homage to Slavery," *Philadelphia Pennsylvania Freeman*, April 21, 1841. Reprinted in *New York Emancipator*, June 17, 1841, quoted in Powell 1994.

⁹ "The Captured Africans," *New York Morning Herald*, September 17, 1839.

¹⁰ "The Amistad Africans in Prison," *New York Morning Herald*, October 9, 1839.

Roman Slavery and American Slavery

"Now, Mr. Jefferson tells us, that our condition is not so hard, as the slaves were under the Romans!!!!!"

(David Walker, *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*, 1829; 1995, 16)

Was slavery crueler in antiquity than in modernity? This was a claim many American slave owners made. In his only book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson took a defensive position on slavery in America by comparing it to slavery in ancient Rome.

We know that among the Romans, about the Augustan age especially, the condition of their slaves was much more deplorable than that of the blacks on the continent of America. The two sexes were confined in separate apartments, because to raise a child cost the master more than to buy one. Cato, for a very restricted indulgence to his slaves in this particular, took from them a certain price. But in this country the slaves multiply as fast as the free inhabitants. Their situation and manners place the commerce between the two sexes almost without restraint. —The same Cato, on a principle of oeconomy, always sold his sick and superannuated slaves. He gives it as a standing precept to a master visiting his farm, to sell his old oxen, old waggons, old tools, old and diseased servants, and every thing else become useless. "*Vendat boves vetulos, plastrum vetus, ferramenta vetera, servum senem, servum morbosum, & si quid aliud supersit vendat.*" The American slaves cannot enumerate this among the injuries and insults they receive. (Jefferson 1785; 1984, 267–8)¹¹

Relying on Cato the Elder's well-known treatise on how to manage a Roman plantation efficiently, *On Agriculture (De agricultura)*, Jefferson considered the condition of slaves in Rome more "deplorable" than in America because slaves on Roman plantations were not allowed to live together and produce children. Moreover, American slaves, unlike slaves in Rome, Jefferson claimed, would not be sold or turned out once they had become old or ill and therefore "useless." Jefferson went on to mention the notoriously cruel Vedius Pollio, "who, in the presence of Augustus, would have given a slave as food to his fish, for having broken a glass" (268).¹² Lastly, Jefferson cited an example in Tacitus' *Annals* in

¹¹ For modern studies of slavery in ancient Rome, see Bradley and Cartledge 2011; Joshel 2010; Bradley 1994 and 1987; Finley 1987; and Wiedemann 1981.

¹² According to Cassius Dio: "Once, when he was entertaining Augustus, his cup-bearer broke a crystal goblet, and without regard for his guest, Pollio ordered the fellow to be thrown to the lampreys. Hereupon the slave fell on his knees before Augustus and supplicated him, and Augustus at first tried to persuade Pollio not to commit so monstrous

which a slave murdered his master and the “ancient custom” of the Romans required that all the slaves in the house had to be executed as punishment for the crime.¹³ “When a master was murdered,” wrote Jefferson, “all his slaves, in the same house, or within hearing, were condemned to death. Here punishment falls on the guilty only, and as precise proof is required as against a freeman” (268). American slaves, Jefferson asserted, were not subject to such sadistic masters as Vedius Pollio nor were all slaves in a household indiscriminately punished for the offenses of one. Jefferson did not attempt to justify slavery in America; instead he defended it as being less harsh than Roman slavery.

Abolitionists quickly noted the absence of an ideology of racial inferiority as a justification for slavery and oppression in Rome.¹⁴ In an 1809 oration to the New York African Society, carpenter and cofounder of the New York African Society for Mutual Relief, William Hamilton, pointed to the absence of racism in Rome, which enabled manumitted slaves to move up socially and economically.

Among the Romans it was only necessary for the slave to be manumitted . . . no sooner was he free than there was open before him a wide field of employment for his ambition and learning and abilities with merit, were as sure to meet with their reward in him, as in any other citizen. But what station above the common employment of craftsmen and laborers would we fill; did we possess both learning and abilities? (1809, 3)

a deed. Then, when Pollio paid no heed to him, the emperor said, ‘Bring all the rest of the drinking vessels which are of like sort or any others of value that you possess, in order that I may use them,’ and when they were brought, he ordered them to be broken. When Pollio saw this, he was vexed, of course; but since he was no longer angry over the one goblet, considering the great number of the others that were ruined, and, on the other hand, could not punish his servant for what Augustus also had done, he held his peace, though much against his will” (*Roman History* 54.23). Translation from: http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/54*.html.

¹³ According to Tacitus: “Soon afterwards one of his own slaves murdered the city-prefect, Pedanius Secundus, either because he had been refused his freedom, for which he had made a bargain, or in the jealousy of a love in which he could not brook his master’s rivalry. Ancient custom required that the whole slave-establishment which had dwelt under the same roof should be dragged to execution . . .” (*Annals* 14.42). Tacitus goes on to describe how many Romans were uncomfortable with this punishment but in the end the slaves were executed (*Annals* 14.42–5). Translation: *Complete Works of Tacitus*, translated by Alfred John Church, William Jackson Brodribb, and Sara Bryant, edited for Perseus at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0078%3Abook%3D14%3Achapter%3D42>.

¹⁴ For the ancient view of blacks, see Snowden 1970 and 1983.

Hamilton pointed out that former slaves in Rome did not have to endure racial prejudice; once freed, the Roman slave could find employment based on his abilities and learning. This was not the case in the United States where there was widespread assumption of the racial inferiority of blacks, free or enslaved, which prevented their economic and social advancement. Modern racial prejudice enabled slavery and ensured that free blacks in America were disadvantaged and not considered full citizens.

In his 1829 *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*, black Boston abolitionist David Walker responded directly to Thomas Jefferson and scornfully dismissed the view that modern slavery was milder than ancient slavery:

Every body who has read history, knows, that as soon as a slave among the Romans obtained his freedom, he could rise to the greatest eminence in the State, and there was no law instituted to hinder a slave from buying his freedom. Have not the Americans instituted laws to hinder us from obtaining our freedom? Do any deny this charge? Read the laws of Virginia, North Carolina, &c. Further: have not the Americans instituted laws to prohibit a man of color from obtaining and holding any office whatever, under the government of the United States of America? Now, Mr. Jefferson tells us, that our condition is not so hard, as the slaves were under the Romans!!!!!! (1829; 1995, 16)

Walker made the important point that in Rome slaves could purchase their freedom while American slaves rarely could. Like Hamilton, Walker noted correctly that in Rome former slaves were not stigmatized and could and did move up the social and economic ladder.¹⁵

Fellow white Bostonian Lydia Maria Child embraced abolitionism with fervor and devoted three years of her life to researching and writing her *Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans*, published in 1833.¹⁶ Child's title alluded to the title of David Walker's pamphlet and her work supports his demands for equality for black people. In her *Appeal*, she offered a well-researched set of arguments to refute the moral, legal, economic, and racial aspects of the slavery controversy. Child's *Appeal* was a definitive analysis of the history of slavery and the

¹⁵ While it is true that the Romans gave ex-slaves almost all the rights and privileges of Roman citizenship, ex-slaves could not hold political office (nor could they serve in the army).

¹⁶ See the discussion of Child in Winterer 2007, 169–77, and for a biography of Child see Karcher 1994.

southern slave code. Child pointedly disagreed with Thomas Jefferson's well-known claim in *Notes from Virginia* that American slavery was less cruel than slavery in antiquity. "Between ancient and modern slavery there is this remarkable distinction," Child asserted, "the former originated in motives of humanity; the latter is dictated solely by avarice." "The ancients," Child pointed out, "made slaves of captives taken in war, as an amelioration of the original custom of indiscriminate slaughter; the moderns attack defenseless people, without provocation, and steal them, for the express purpose of making them slaves" (1836, 28). Thus, the causes of slavery in antiquity were not the same as they were in modernity where Africans were kidnapped and sold as chattel in the modern slave trade. The modern trafficking of humans for profit, what black abolitionist poet Frances Ellen Watkins Harper will call "a fearful alchemy by which blood can be transformed into gold" (Harper 1857, 3)¹⁷ and the terrible conditions the slaves must endure were, in Child's judgment, far "more odious than the ancient" (Child 1836, 28). Child and other abolitionists were well aware that commodity trade in slaves in capitalist networks of exchange, where slaves were kidnapped and traded by Africans to Europeans, who carried them in horrific conditions through the "Middle Passage," to be exchanged for raw materials that were then brought back to Europe, was a modern and barbarous phenomenon.¹⁸

Slavery, Child further argued, inevitably degraded the bodies and the characters of both slave and master. Thomas Jefferson had criticized slavery in his *Notes from Virginia* for the "boisterous passions" and "unremitting despotism" it required of the master and the "degrading submissions" required of the slave (Jefferson 1984, 288).¹⁹ Child quoted Thomas Jefferson and agreed that slavery corrupted slave owners,

¹⁷ The passage in Harper reads, more fully: "A hundred thousand new-born babes are annually added to the victims of slavery; twenty thousand lives are annually sacrificed on the plantations of the South. Such a sight should send a thrill of horror through the nerves of civilization and impel the heart of humanity to lofty deeds. So it might, if men had not found out a fearful alchemy by which this blood can be transformed into gold. Instead of listening to the cry of agony, they listen to the ring of dollars and stoop down to pick up the coin."

¹⁸ On the terrible conditions of transport, see Smallwood 2008 and Rediker 2007.

¹⁹ "The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other" (Query XVIII).

including women (16). She described a New England woman who was originally “amiable” and “affectionate” who had become a “fiend” since moving to the South and acquiring slaves.

One faithful negro woman nursed the twins of her mistress, and did all the washing, ironing, and scouring. If, after a sleepless night with the restless babes (driven from the bosom of their own mother) she performed her toilsome avocations with diminished activity, her mistress, with her own lady-like hands, applied the cow-skin, and the neighborhood resounded with the cries of her victims. (34)

In Child’s view, becoming a slave owner had made the New Englander indolent, unmaternal, and sadistic.

Abolitionist and statesman Charles Sumner agreed that slavery had ill effects on slave owners. To make this point, he looked back to Cato the Elder “one of the most virtuous slaveholders in history,” whose “writings show the hardening influence of a system which treats human beings like cattle” (Sumner 1853, 24). Sumner cited the very passage Jefferson had quoted in his defense of American slavery as less onerous than Roman slavery: “Let the husbandman, says Cato, sell his old oxen, his sickly cattle, his sickly sheep . . . his old wagons, his old implements, *his old slave, and his diseased slave . . . he should be a seller, rather than a buyer*” (Sumner 1853, 24, quoting Cato, *De agricultura* 2). In Cato’s cost-benefit analysis of how best to run a plantation, he determined that it was more economical to sell sick cattle, old tools, and old and sick slaves rather than to care for them. That Cato, virtuous in so many ways, could put human beings, animals, and tools in the same category and measure their worth in terms of their usefulness to their owner was, for Sumner, evidence of deleterious moral effects of the institution of slavery on slave owners.

Former slaves had terrible tales to tell about their former owners. In his autobiography, Frederick Douglass recounted that as a young child he witnessed the cruelty and sadism of his owner.

He was a cruel man, hardened by a long life of slaveholding. He would at times seem to take great pleasure in whipping a slave, I have often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most heart-rending shrieks of an own aunt of mine, whom he used to tie up to a joist, and whip upon her naked back until she was literally covered with blood. No words, no tears, from his gory victim, seemed to move his iron heart from its bloody purpose. The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped; and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped longest. He would

whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to swing the blood-clotted cow skin.

(Douglass 1845, chapter 1)

Witnessing such horrific violence inflicted upon his aunt seared Douglass's consciousness. Douglass went on to record that he, too, was on the receiving end of many whippings by his various masters. William Wells Brown described one of his former masters, a Mr. Freeland, as depraved and dissolute: "Freeland was one of the real chivalry of the South; besides being himself a slaveholder, he was a horse-racer, cock-fighter, gambler, and, to crown the whole, an inveterate drunkard" (Brown 1855, 10). Although David Walker was born free in Wilmington, North Carolina, his freedom did not shield him from seeing firsthand the degradations and injustices of slavery. He witnessed much misery in his youth, where he saw "enough to make his very heart bleed," including one traumatic episode of a son who was forced to whip his mother until she died.²⁰

As for the impact of slavery on former slaves, the Reverend Alexander Crummell knew well the degraded condition of ex-slaves whom he saw arriving in Liberia, West Africa. After graduating from Queens' College, Cambridge, Crummell left England for Liberia, as a missionary of the Protestant Episcopal Church, where he remained (with return lecture trips to the United States) for twenty years.²¹ Crummell viewed the condition of African American slaves as far worse than the "pagan" African whose "whole history has been a history of moral degradation deeper and more damning than their heathen status in Africa... I unhesitatingly affirm that they would have been more blessed and far superior as pagans in Africa than slaves on the plantations of the South"

²⁰ "Any man who is curious to see the full force of ignorance developed among the colored people of the United States of America, has only to go into the southern and western states of this confederacy, where, if he is not a tyrant, but has the feelings of a human being, who can feel for a fellow creature, he may see enough to make his very heart bleed! He may see there, a son take his mother, who bore almost the pains of death to give him birth, and by the command of a tyrant, strip her as naked as she came into the world, and apply the cow-hide to her, until she falls a victim to death in the road!" (Walker and Garnet 1848; 1969, 32).

²¹ Liberia had been founded and colonized by freed American slaves with the help of a private organization called the American Colonization Society in 1821–2, on the premise that former American slaves would have greater freedom and equality there than in the United States.

(Crummell 1969, 91–2). His classical learning shaped his perceptions of African culture.

The very words in which Cicero and Tacitus describe the homes and families of the Germanic tribes can truly be ascribed to the people of the West Coast of Africa. Their maidenly virtue, the instinct to chastity, is a marvel. I have no hesitation in the generalization that in West Africa every female is a virgin to the day of her marriage. The harlot class is unknown in all the tribes. I venture the assertion that any one walking through Pall Mall, London, or Broadway, New York, for a week would see more indecency in look and act than he could discover in an African town in a dozen years. (Crummell 1969, 87)²²

In a letter to a friend, Crummell again referenced Tacitus. He wrote that African culture, while primitive and pagan, had an admirable purity and virility.

You have perchance, strengthened your powers with the robustness of Tacitus; and you may remember how he refers, in plaintive, melancholy tones, to the once virile power of Roman manhood and the chaste beauty and excellence of its womanhood, and mourns their sad decline. And, doubtless, you have felt the deepest interest in the simple but ingenious testimony he bears to the primitive virtues of the Germanic tribe, pagan though they were, and which have proved the historic basis of their eminence and unfailing grandeur.

(Crummell 1969, 32–3)²³

Tacitus' romanticized descriptions of the primitive Germans offered a sharp and clear contrast to the decadence of his own society. Similarly, Crummell's descriptions of the primitive West Africans provided a critique of the current debased state of African American slaves. Describing newly arriving former slaves to Liberia in a letter, Crummell wrote:

They come out here, whole cargoes of them, fresh from the plantations, and with rare and individual exceptions ignorant, benighted, besotted and filthy, both in the inner and the outer man: for believe me Sir, the life of these men, that is their

²² "They live, therefore, fenced around with chastity; corrupted by no seductive spectacles, no convivial incitements. Men and women are alike unacquainted with clandestine correspondence. Adultery is extremely rare among so numerous a people... Still more exemplary is the practice of those states in which none but virgins marry, and the expectations and wishes of a wife are at once brought to a period. Thus, they take one husband as one body and one life; that no thought, no desire, may extend beyond him; and he may be loved not only as their husband, but as their marriage." Translation from: Tacitus, *Germania* 19.110–15, *The Oxford Translation Revised*, online at: http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/europe/l/bl_text_Tacitus_Germania.htm.

²³ For further analysis, see Moses 1989, 645ff.

inner life, is gone: crushed out or beaten out! And only shreds—the wreck of humanity remains to be seen, and to have one’s heart broken when seen.

(Crummell quoted in Moses 1989, 646)

Slavery had so degraded Africans that they were now barely human.

Abolitionists viewed slavery as the dark side of Roman antiquity, its greatest flaw. Damningly, they argued that the practice and experience of slavery in Rome paled in comparison to the horrors of the modern slave trade and slavery in America. Slavery, they asserted, degraded masters and slaves. Furthermore, as Philadelphia minister and printer Russell Parrott succinctly noted in his oration in celebration of the abolition of the slave trade in 1812, existence of ancient slavery does not legitimate modern slavery: “The antiquity of a crime does not constitute its justification” (Parrott 1812, 6).

Conspiracy, Contagion, and Corruption?

“Some point with exultation to the prosperity of ancient Rome with her millions of slaves; others with equal exultation point to her decay as the work of the avenging spirit of slavery.”

(William O. Blake, *The History of Slavery and the Slave Trade, Ancient and Modern*, 1857; 1969, xvi)

In his intensely antislavery speech “The Crime Against Kansas” delivered to a packed Senate on May 19 and May 20, 1856, Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner dramatically compared the dangers the “Slave Power” (the political arm of slave owners and their efforts to protect and expand slavery) posed to the health and survival of the American republic to the threat posed to the Roman republic by the conspiracy of the patrician senator Lucius Sergius Catilina (Catiline) in 63 BCE. The context for his speech was The Kansas–Nebraska Act of 1854, designed by Democratic senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois, which had created the territories of Kansas and Nebraska, opening new lands for settlement. This had the effect of allowing white male settlers in those territories to determine through popular sovereignty whether they would allow slavery within each territory. Fearing the spread of slavery, Sumner argued for the immediate admission of Kansas to the Union as a free state and warned that southern members of Congress and their supporters were using their political muscle to push for slavery in the new territories which, if

not checked, might ultimately result in the Slave Power's takeover of the federal government.

In his speech, Sumner attacked David Rice Atchison, proslavery senator from Missouri and compared him to the Roman senator Catiline who had plotted with his supporters to overturn the Roman republic. "Like Catiline he stalked into this Chamber, reeking with conspiracy—*immo in Senatum venit*—and then like Catiline he skulked away—*abiit, excessit, evasit, erupit*—to join and to provoke the conspirators, who at a distance awaited their congenial chief." What was worse, "the similitude with Catiline was again renewed in the sympathy, not even concealed, which he [Atchison] found in the very Senate itself, where, beyond even the Roman example, a Senator has not hesitated to appear as his open compurgator" (Sumner 1856, 8).²⁴ Sumner lamented that despite what he was certain was strong evidence of a slave power conspiracy, "Senators here have argued that this cannot be so—precisely as the conspiracy of Catiline was doubted in the Roman Senate." He again quoted Cicero:

[Quamquam] nonnulli sunt in hoc ordine, qui aut ea quae imminet non videant, aut quae vident dissimulant: qui spem Catilinae mollibus sententiis aluerunt conjunctionemque nascentem non credendo corroboraverunt. (Sumner 1856, 13)²⁵

[Although] there are some among our ranks who either do not see the things which threaten, or they pretend not to see what they do see, who have nourished Catilina's hope with their flimsy opinions and have given strength to his emerging conspiracy by not believing it . . .²⁶

Sumner cast himself in the role of Cicero, the Roman consul who in 63 BCE discovered and then exposed the conspiracy of Catiline to overturn the republic in four orations delivered to the Roman senate. In gratitude for having saved the republic, the Roman senate conferred upon Cicero the title of *pater patriae*. In Sumner's five-hour speech, delivered over the course of two days from memory, the danger facing the American republic was the conspiracy of slaveholders to take over the government in order to protect and expand slavery. Instead of receiving thanks, Sumner was nearly killed two days after he finished

²⁴ Sumner is quoting Cicero: *immo in Senatum venit* is from Cicero's *First Oration Against Catiline* (1.1.15); and *abiit, excessit, evasit, erupit* is from Cicero's *Second Oration Against Catiline* (2.1.6).

²⁵ The Latin passage is from Cicero's *First Oration Against Catiline* (1.12.30).

²⁶ Thanks to Donald T. McGuire for the English translation of Cicero.

his speech by South Carolina congressman Preston Brooks, who repeatedly caned him on the senate floor. In Sumner's speech, he had characterized the attacker's cousin, South Carolina senator Andrew Butler, as a pimp for slavery, and Brooks felt the need to defend the honor and views of his family and other like-minded South Carolinians.²⁷

Abolitionists frequently drew an analogy between slavery and disease. They argued that it was slavery that had led to the decline and fall of Rome and warned that slavery was similarly undermining the health of the American body politic. For instance, in 1847, prominent Massachusetts businessman, abolitionist, and former head of the American Missionary Society, William Jackson, published a four-part essay in the abolitionist newspaper the *National Era* in which he described slavery as a contagion that contaminated polities ancient and modern. The fatal error the Romans made was to have "appropriated their wealth and power to the purposes of oppression. They procured slaves, and undertook to live upon the proceeds of their labor." The reliance on slavery corrupted the Roman people:

the arts and sciences were neglected; and the power and glory of empire departed. The Roman name ceased to inspire terror among the rude and hardy barbarians of the north, and they issued forth in swarms, to prostrate the tottering remains of that mighty power which had so long kept them in awe.

Jackson pointed to the effects of slavery in ancient Rome as a warning for the United States. "Slavery is a disease in the body politic," he concluded, and it "tends to produce poverty, ignorance, vice, and barbarism; and that the more extensively it prevails, and the longer it is allowed to continue, the more fully will those effects be developed" (Jackson, *National Era* July 15, 1847).

A contributor to the *Colored American* agreed that Rome became decadent and debased because of slavery. "By looking over the history of Rome, it will be seen that the greatest elevation of character was before

²⁷ "Of course he [Senator Andrew Butler] has chosen a mistress to whom he has made his vows, and who, though ugly to others, is always lovely to him; though polluted in the sight of the world, is chaste in his sight I mean the harlot, Slavery. For her, his tongue is always profuse in words. Let her be impeached in character, or any proposition made to shut her out from the extension of her wantonness, and no extravagance of manner or hardihood of assertion is then too great for this Senator" (Sumner 1856, 3).

the introduction of slavery.” Commenting on the influx of slaves in the wake of Rome’s conquests, he wrote:

With such an influx of slaves is it at all surprising that Rome should become debased, treacherous, sensual, and unmindful of human rights? Is it at all strange that her glory was lost in the degradation of millions? If, in the eastern hemisphere, slavery has overthrown the most flourishing and power [*sic*] Republics, have we not reason to fear that it may undermine the pillars that support ours?

(“Republics,” *Colored American* August 17, 1839)

William Lloyd Garrison, editor of the abolitionist newspaper the *Liberator*, likewise demanded to know what should save America from the fate of the Romans, a fate brought on, he believed, by slavery, intemperance, and licentiousness (Garrison 1852, 48–9).

The abolitionist argument that slavery led to the collapse of the Roman republic ultimately made its way into histories written by African Americans after the Civil War. For instance, in his 1887 *History of the Colored Race in America*, William T. Alexander argued that Rome was “corrupted, debauched, and ultimately ruined by slavery.” Roman decline began with the vast importation of slaves in the wake of its conquests first of Italy and then the Mediterranean world. “Diogenes with his lantern might have looked for many a long day among the followers of Marius, or Catiline, or Caesar, in vain, for a poor, but virtuous and self-respecting Roman citizen of the days of Cincinnatus or even Regulus.” Drawing an analogy between slavery in Rome and in America, he argued that slavery made labor dishonorable, corrupted morals, and led to a decline in civic virtue; all of which made the “preservation of republican liberty impossible” (Alexander 1887, 123–4).²⁸

Southerners vehemently rejected connections between slavery and decline. Slavery was the *sine qua non* of the great achievements of antiquity, insisted proslavery writer George Fitzhugh: “high civilization and domestic slavery did not merely co-exist, they were cause and effect . . . [without it] they never would have produced a poet, an orator, a sculptor or an

²⁸ The argument that slavery led to the decline of Rome is still made. In Aldo Schiavone’s 2000 *The End of the Past: Ancient Rome and the Modern West*, he argued that slavery affected every aspect of the Roman economy, and the crisis of the empire was due to the limitations caused by the system of slavery. The slave system itself corrupted and deformed the Roman economy to such an extent that the collapse of the empire was almost bound to occur.

architect” (Fitzhugh 1854; 1965, 43). Slavery was necessary for the Pantheon or Vergil. Those enamored of Roman institutions and culture made the argument that political order and culture depended on a leisured class. Rome flourished because slavery freed citizens from the necessity of labor and gave them *otium*—the leisure necessary for participating in politics and the cultivation of the arts. Similarly, slavery provided *otium* for the Southern master class. The connection between slavery, *otium*, and liberty had deep roots in Southern culture. The 1776 design for the seal of the state of Virginia included a motto chosen for the outer rim placed in an arc around personifications of *Libertas*, *Ceres*, and *Aeternitas*: *Deus nobis haec otia fecit* (“God has granted us this leisure”).²⁹ *Otium*, as David H. Fischer has pointed out, is here both leisure and independence. It is freedom from having to till the soil (which slaves will do) and a freedom from dependence on another’s will (Fischer 2005, 64–5). “I am an aristocrat,” said Senator John Randolph of Roanoke, Virginia, “I love liberty, I hate equality” (Randolph quoted in Fischer 2005, 67). Liberty and culture depended upon inequality, hierarchy, and above all, slavery.

Latifundia perdidere Italiam (“Plantations ruined Italy” Pliny, *Natural History* 18.7)

In addition to general warnings about the dangers of slavery to the health and future of the American republic, a more specific warning about decline was culled from Roman history about the dangers posed by slavery on plantations, Roman and American. In 1834, United States historian George Bancroft published a long essay on Roman decline in the *North American Review*, which was later republished in his 1857 *Literary and Historical Miscellanies* and excerpted in magazines and newspapers. In it, Bancroft argued that the pernicious effects of slavery and extreme differences in wealth and property resulted in the collapse of the Roman republic. The critical turning point for the Roman republic was not the dictatorship of Julius Caesar, the view the Founding Fathers had held, but rather the “ill success of the reform of Gracchus.” In Bancroft’s view, the Roman senate’s response to the efforts of the

²⁹ The motto comes from Vergil, *Eclogues* 1.6.

Roman tribunes Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus (168–133 BCE) and his brother Gaius Sempronius Gracchus (159–121 BCE) for land reform was the real “destroyer” of the Roman republic (Bancroft 1857, 287). Bancroft projected back onto the Roman republic the American North’s vision of the liberty-loving free laborer who tilled his fields. In Bancroft’s interpretation of the careers of the Gracchi they became the defenders of a Roman “yeomanry” just as he and other supporters of land reform were the defenders of the ideal of the Jeffersonian yeomanry.

Bancroft began his influential essay by summarizing Plutarch’s account of the future Roman tribune Tiberius Gracchus’ journey through Italy, where “instead of little farms . . . he beheld nearly all the lands of Italy engrossed by large proprietors and the plough was in the hands of the slave” (280). Not only did slaves farm land that once belonged to free Romans, wrote Bancroft, they also did jobs once performed by free laborers. Slavery forced Roman citizen farmers and urban Roman plebeians into idleness and unemployment.

What Tiberius Gracchus had attempted to do, in George Bancroft’s interpretation, was to “create a Roman yeomanry.” In Bancroft’s view, the Roman tribune’s aim was “to lift the brood of idle persons into dignity; to give them land, to put the plough into their hands, to make them industrious and useful, and so to repose on them the liberties of the state” (284). Bancroft identified the rejection by the Roman senate of the proposed land reforms of Tiberius Gracchus as the critical moment in the decline of the Roman republic. The Roman senate’s failure to provide land for the Roman free man led to his slide into dependence and indolence, which, in turn, led to a decline of the republican virtues that produced a strong and vigorous state. “The patricians took away the business of the sandal-maker,” Bancroft argued, “in every community where slavery is tolerated, the poor freeman will always be found complaining of hard times” (287). The Roman plebeian was forced into idleness, Bancroft asserted, and robbed of his liberty to produce for himself. Slavery, Bancroft concluded, was responsible for the decline of the Roman republic and he worried it would undermine the American republic.

In 1858, Massachusetts senator Henry Wilson pointed to the exhaustion of Southern soil and compared it to the soil worked by slaves in ancient Rome. “Millions of acres of the richest soil of the western world have been converted into barrenness and desolation, by the untutored,

unpaid, and thriftless labor of slaves. This . . . reminds us of the desolating effects of Slavery upon the rich fields of classic Italy, in the days of Tiberius Gracchus.³⁰ Opening the public lands in the West to chattel slavery, which was what many in the South wanted, precisely because of soil exhaustion in the South, was problematic because of the deleterious effect it would have on the aspirations of white men who would like to farm land recently added to the nation.³¹

In 1847, Henry Ruffner, a slaveholder, Presbyterian minister, and president of Washington College in Virginia, published an antislavery pamphlet. In his 1847 *Address to the People of West Virginia*, Ruffner agreed that slavery was bad for planters and the soil. He made numerous pragmatic economic arguments against slavery, one of which dealt with slave labor on plantations. Ruffner informed his readers, "slave labor is proved to be far less productive than free labor" (20). "Agriculture in the slave States may be characterized in general by two epithets—extensive [and] exhaustive," Ruffner opined, and

. . . the general system of slave holding farmers and planters, in all times and places, has been, and now is, and ever will be, to cultivate as much land, badly, for present gain—in short to kill the goose that lays the golden egg. They cannot do otherwise with laborers who work by compulsion, for the benefit only of their masters; and whose sole interest in the matter is, to do as little and to consume as much as possible. (Ruffner 1847, 20)

Ruffner then summoned Pliny's remarks on Roman plantations in Italy to support his own argument that extensive and exhaustive farming of the land by unmotivated slave labor will "kill the goose that lays the golden egg," meaning that it will result in impoverished soil and a lack of productivity (Pliny, *Natural History* 18.1–7). Referencing Pliny, Ruffner wrote, "when the lands were engrossed by a few great proprietors, and cultivated by fettered and branded slaves, the country was ruined, and corn had to be imported." Moreover, Pliny, according to Ruffner, "denounces as worst of all, the system of having large estates in the country cultivated by slaves, or indeed, says he, 'to have anything done by

³⁰ Speech by Hon. Henry Wilson, MA, "Are Working Men Slaves?" a reply to Hon. J. H. Hammond of South Carolina in the Senate on March 20, 1858, on the Bill to Admit Kansas under the Leocompton Constitution, published in *National Era* April 29, 1858, 69. See Craven 1926 on soil exhaustion in Virginia and Maryland.

³¹ For a more detailed discussion of the uses of the Gracchi in nineteenth-century American political discourse, see Malamud 2009, 46–61.

men who labor without hope for reward" (20–1).³² Ruffner concluded that not only are Southern slave plantations worked by slaves bad for the planters and the soil, the long-term consequences of such practices might well lead to ruin and decline as they had in Rome.

Most Southern slaveholders, however, rejected a link between slavery and decline, in ancient Rome or the American South. In 1847, the same year Ruffner's pamphlet was published, "Philaethes" ("Lover of Truth"), writing for *The Southern and Western Literary Messenger and Review*, dismissed a connection between slavery and agricultural decline in ancient Rome and the implications of that argument for proslavery advocates. Worrying that such an argument could be used to support abolition and the spread of slavery in the West, he set about to persuade his readers that there were other, weightier reasons for decline in Rome. "If the principles of the abolitionists had been adopted in their fullest extent in ancient Italy," he assured his readers, "they could only partially have prevented the evils which have been mentioned." There were five other more important causes than slavery for agricultural decline, he argued: "The absence of many of its citizens in the provinces—the devotion of so large a portion of Italy to purposes of mere luxury,—centralization of political power in the metropolis,—frequent largesses of corn, and insecurity of landed property" (478). He asserted, "But enough has been said to show that in tracing its original decline to slavery alone, we should completely overlook some of the best ascertained and most prominent facts in Roman history" (476). In short, the "lover of truth" argued, slavery had little to do with Roman decline.

Five years earlier, in a similar vein, the writer William Gilmore Simms made the argument that it was Rome's imperial expansion rather than slavery that was the cause of agricultural decline in Rome:

Their successful wars beguiled them from the simple tastes of husbandry, and by yielding to their arms a thousand tributary empires, vitiated their habits and debased their virtues . . . The regular habits of the husbandman were exchanged for those which were more congenial to the roving customs of warlike life. At home the agricultural arts were abandoned or greatly neglected, and we may date the real beginning of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire from that period when they became habitually dependent for their supplies of grain, on the conquered provinces. (1842, 311)

³² Italics in the original; cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 18.7.

Simms did not even mention slavery; he saw no connection whatsoever between the rise of agribusiness propelled by slave labor on plantations and the demise of the Roman citizen farmer. Instead, imperial expansion corrupted the work ethic and morals of the republican farmer. Prominent South Carolina judge William Harper even made the argument that contemporary agricultural decline in Italy was a result of the *loss* of domestic slavery. Pointing to the degraded conditions of modern Italy “as compared to her magnificent past,” Harper wrote, “nothing has dealt upon it [Italy] more heavily than the loss of domestic slavery.” Domestic slavery, Harper argued, did not result in decline in ancient Rome, rather it was “political slavery” that corrupted Romans and led to Rome’s decline (Harper 1838, 44–5).

In 1855, George Frederick Holmes, professor at the College of William and Mary, penned the most extensive rebuttal to George Bancroft and others who linked slavery with agricultural and moral decline. He buttressed his essay *Ancient Slavery* with citations from classical authors to counter Northern diatribes on the dangers of slavery—ancient or American. It was not slavery that led to the decline of Rome, Holmes asserted; rather it was “the avarice of the wealthy and their oppression of the poor . . . the increase of wealth, luxury, and rapacity and the corroding influences of universal greed” (618). Citing as correct Pliny’s remark *latifundia perdidere Italiam*, Holmes argued that this should be “attributed to [Roman] greed, luxury, fraud, peculation, plunder, extortion, and oppression, but not to slavery” (626).³³ In fact, Holmes claimed, the “licentious greed, the peculating and hungry indolence of the Romans” destroyed free labor in Italy (626). Holmes and other proslavery authors were able to separate land monopoly from slavery—they did not make the connection that it was due to slave labor and land monopoly that the rich got richer. Moving back and forth from the classical past to the present, Holmes insisted that it was not slavery that produces rapacity—for the same tendencies, he pointed out, are manifested by the capitalists in the Northern states of America and abroad. Was it slavery, he asked, that had made England and parts of the United States a “manufacturing hell”? (622). “Substitute the word machinery for slavery, and it is applicable to the most advanced civilization of the present century” (619).

³³ The sentence is from Pliny, *Natural History* 18.7.

For Holmes, the culprits in Rome were the corrupt and avaricious Roman landowners and in the modern world greedy capitalists. Slavery, emphatically, was not the cause of the demise of free labor in Rome or modern America.

As for the Gracchi, Holmes pointed out that they were not interested in abolishing or abating slavery. They expended their energies on trying to restore public land to what he, like George Bancroft, termed the Roman “yeomanry.” Holmes believed this was a good thing—the failure of the Romans to support the citizen-farmer class, the class that provided soldiers for the Roman armies, resulted in a decline of a loyal and patriotic base for Rome’s military—and Holmes and others recognized the value of a strong yeoman class to their own slave society. Proslavery Southerners viewed the Gracchi as essentially conservative and they approved of their sympathy for a strong and loyal Roman yeomanry. To their minds, the Gracchi were reformers, not social revolutionaries. It was ridiculous to claim that they wanted to eliminate Roman slavery. Southern planter elites could thus admire the Gracchi for their honor, their oratorical skills, and their calls for reform even as they rejected Northern attempts to implement agrarian reforms similar to those the Gracchi proposed.³⁴

In the middle of the Civil War, Francis Lieber, Prussian professor of history and political economy at South Carolina College from 1836 to 1856, explicitly compared the plight of the Southern yeoman farmer with the Roman free farmer threatened by slavery in his *Plantations for Slave Labor: The Death of the Yeomanry*. Lieber had been a literary assistant to Roman historian Barthold Georg Niebuhr in Rome, who had praised the Gracchi in his history of Rome as essentially heroic and tragic figures who unsuccessfully attempted to force members of the ruling class to address the desperate plight of the Roman free men. Lieber’s concern was with the health of a yeomanry and he believed that plantations in the South threatened this class just as Roman plantations in Italy had threatened Roman farmers. “Whether we call them *latifundia* or plantations,” Lieber insisted, “a yeomanry cannot exist by the side of them” (1863, 4). He credited Tiberius Gracchus with recognizing the importance of the yeomanry to a healthy society and believed that as in Rome

³⁴ For discussion of the Southern planter view of the Gracchi, see Malamud 2009, 80–9.

now in the American South “the small and respectable freeholder is indispensable to the cohesion and permanency of our country. Slavery is incompatible with such yeomanry” (7). Unlike George Frederick Holmes and other defenders of slavery, Lieber saw clearly the connection between slavery and the plight of the Roman farmer and yeoman farmer in the American South.

Let us return to Cato the Younger. As the Civil War drew to its inexorable close, the faltering South turned for inspiration to Cato’s willingness to die rather than submit to the “tyranny” of Julius Caesar. In 1865, shortly before the fall of Richmond, Virginia, the prominent writer and journalist Edward Alfred Pollard composed a small pamphlet, *The Glory of History is Honour*, urging the people of Richmond to continue to resist the Yankees. In his pamphlet, he compared the contemporary struggle to the battle of Cato and the defenders of the republic against the dictator Julius Caesar. Pollard was a member of the aristocratic elite of Richmond, a city located on seven hills which led its inhabitants to call it “our Rome,” and whose capitol building Thomas Jefferson had designed after a Roman temple.³⁵ To inspire his fellow citizens, Pollard cited passages from Plutarch that describe the fall of Utica and Cato’s suicide:

“For me,” said Cato, “intercede not. It is for the conquered to turn suppliants, and for those who have done an injury to beg pardon. For my part, I have been unconquered through life, and superiour in the things I wished to be; for in justice and honour I am Caesar’s superior.” (360–8)³⁶

Pollard makes Richmond the South’s Utica and those who resist the Yankee Caesar comparable in honor to those who held out against the Roman Caesar. Pollard wrote,

“My friends, this is not rubbish. The glory of History is indifferent to events: it is simply Honour. . . . I am for Virginia going down to history, proudly and starkly, with the title of a subjugated people . . . rather than as a people who ever submitted and bartered their honour for the mercy of an enemy.” (365–8)

Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, was compared to Cato both during the war and after his death in 1889. One panegyric declared

³⁵ Ronnick (1997, 19) drew my attention to this pamphlet. Pollard also wrote *Southern History of the War* (1865) and *The Lost Cause* (1866), his most popular book.

³⁶ Plutarch, *Life of Cato the Younger* 64.4–5. Pollard also quoted by Ronnick 1997, 20–1.

“not Cato himself spoke to his Senate at Utica with more dignity and steadfastness than does the Southern President when addressing his suffering fellow countrymen” (quoted in Ronnick 1997, 19). Shortly after Appomattox, the last battle of the war, Virginia planter Edmund Ruffin, who had fired the opening shot of the Civil War at Fort Sumter, metaphorically wrapped himself in the Confederate flag and committed suicide at his plantation. Like Cato, he preferred death to living under the tyranny of a (Yankee) Caesar.

Victrix causa diis placuit sed victa Catoni
 (“The conquering cause was pleasing to the
 gods but the conquered cause pleased Cato”
 Lucan, *Pharsalia*, 1.128)

After a botched attempt to fall on his sword, the defeated but defiant Cato put an end to his life, as Plutarch memorably relates:

Cato did not immediately die of the wound; but struggling, fell off the bed, and throwing down a little mathematical table that stood by, made such a noise that the servants, hearing it, cried out. And immediately his son and all his friends came into the chamber, where, seeing him lie weltering in his own blood, great part of his bowels out of his body, but himself still alive and able to look at them, they all stood in horror. The physician went to him, and would have put in his bowels, which were not pierced, and sewed up the wound; but Cato, recovering himself, and understanding the intention, thrust away the physician, plucked out his own bowels, and tearing open the wound, immediately expired.³⁷

By thus expiring, Cato created an exceptionally active afterlife for himself. He remained a potent exemplar for Southern loyalists long after the end (one cannot call it a resolution) of the Civil War. In 1914, as the United States was about to enter the Great War in Europe, the United Daughters of the Confederacy funded the Confederate Soldiers' Memorial at the Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia. Moses Ezekiel, born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1844, designed and executed the thirty-two-foot bronze and marble memorial. The South is personified as a woman,

³⁷ Plutarch, *Life of Cato the Younger* 70.5–6. Translation from: *Plutarch's Lives The Translation Called Dryden's Corrected from the Greek and Revised by A. H. Clough*, vol. 4, 492.

crowned with olive leaves. Her left hand holds a laurel wreath representing a moral victory and honor, which she bestows upon her fallen sons and daughters. Below, in the center of the base of the monument, is the goddess Athena holding up with her left arm a female figure representing the South, who is collapsing in military defeat. She holds in her hand a shield inscribed with the word "Constitution." At the base of the monument is a Latin inscription from Lucan's *Pharsalia*, the epic of Rome's civil war, whose hero is the unyielding Cato: *Victrix causa diis placuit sed victa Catoni*.

In the ears of those devoted to the Confederate cause, Lucan's defeated *causa* still resonates. In 1999, interpreting the monument 85 years after its dedication, on the occasion of the 191st birthday of Jefferson Davis, Father Alister C. Anderson, Chaplain-in-Chief of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, remarked that the line from Lucan

illustrates the truth of an historical continuum from the time of this ancient war to that of the War for Southern Independence . . . *victrix causa*, referring to Julius Caesar's inordinate ambition and his lust for total power, is compared with President Lincoln and the Federal Government's desire and power to crush and destroy the South . . . and Cato represents the noble aims of the Southern Confederacy.³⁸

Those loyal to the Confederacy appropriated Lucan's noble Cato for their "lost cause."

Since the administration of Woodrow Wilson (1913–21), presidents have annually sent a wreath to the Arlington Confederate Monument.³⁹ On May 18, 2009, dozens of American scholars sent a letter to President Barack H. Obama asking him to not send a wreath because the "monument was intended to legitimize secession and the principles of the Confederacy and glorify the Confederacy." As for the Latin motto, it is "a classical reference which . . . implies that Lincoln was a despot and the Union cause unjust; [and that] Cato, the stoic believer in 'freedom,' would have sided with the Confederacy . . . [which is] a denial of the wrong committed against African Americans by slave owners, Confederates,

³⁸ Anderson's speech, delivered on June 6, 1999, is available at the Arlington National Cemetery website: <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/anderson-address.htm>.

³⁹ Prior to the administration of George H. W. Bush (1989–93), this was done on or near the birthday of Jefferson Davis. Starting with George H. W. Bush, it has been done on Memorial Day.

and neo-Confederates, through the monument's denial of slavery as the cause of secession and its holding up of Confederates as heroes . . . We ask you to break this chain of racism . . . and not send a wreath."⁴⁰ Even Obama was caught in the nexus of these associations. He had to negotiate carefully the potent symbolism of the monument with its ideologically charged Latin motto. The nation's first African American president sent a wreath to the Arlington Confederate Cemetery. References to Rome in debates over slavery and politics remain fiercely contested; their meaning shifts in accordance with the ideological and political concerns of their producers.⁴¹

⁴⁰ The letter is available on the History News Network at George Mason University: <http://www.hnn.us/articles/85884.html>.

⁴¹ This section reproduces Malamud 2011, 310–11.

6

The Romance of Roman Error

Encountering Antiquity in Hawthorne's *The Marble Faun*

Catharine Edwards

The complex pleasure of exploring Rome is celebrated in Augustus Hare's idiosyncratic but hugely popular pocket-sized work, *Walks in Rome* (first published in 1871), which aimed "to guide the traveller in his daily wanderings through the city."¹ Hare intersperses lengthy quotations from a range of literary and historical texts (including Byron's poetry and scenes from Germaine de Staël's *Corinne*) with his own opinionated account of the city's sights. Nathaniel Hawthorne's last major work, *The Marble Faun, or the Romance of Monte Beni* (1860), a novel or "Romance," set principally in Rome, recurs several times among the texts featured;² in his introduction, Hare quotes the following passage:

When we have once known Rome, and left her where she lies, like a long decaying corpse, retaining a trace of the noble shape it was, but with accumulated dust and a fungous growth overspreading all its more admirable features;—left her in utter weariness, no doubt, of her narrow, crooked, intricate streets, so uncomfortably paved with little squares of lava that to tread over them is a penitential pilgrimage, so indescribably ugly, moreover, so cold, so alley-like, into which the sun never falls, and where a chill wind forces its deadly breath into our lungs;—left

¹ 1900, 2. The guidebook went through twenty-two editions.

² In the 1900 edition, Hawthorne is quoted at vol. I 28–9 (on the view from the Pincio); 52 (the Trevi fountain); 110 (Trajan's forum); 295 (via Appia).

her tired of the sight of those immense, seven-storied, yellow-washed hovels, or call them palaces, where all that is dreary in domestic life seems magnified and multiplied, and weary of climbing those staircases, which ascend from a ground floor of cook-shops, cobblers' stalls, stables, and regiments of cavalry, to a middle region of princes, cardinals, and ambassadors, and an upper tier of artists, just beneath the unattainable sky;—left her, worn out with shivering at the cheerless and smoky fireside by day, and feasting with our own substance the ravenous little populace of a Roman bed at night;—left her, sick at heart of Italian trickery, which has uprooted whatever faith in man's integrity had endured till now, and sick at stomach of sour bread, sour wine, rancid butter, and bad cookery, needlessly bestowed on evil meats;—left her disgusted with the pretence of Holiness and the reality of Nastiness, each equally omnipresent;—left her, half-lifeless from the languid atmosphere, the vital principle of which has been used up, long ago, or corrupted by myriads of slaughters;—left her, crushed down in spirit with the desolation of her ruin, and the hopelessness of her future;—left her, in short, hating her with all our might, and adding our individual curse to the infinite Anathema which her old crimes have unmistakably brought down;—when we have left Rome in such mood as this, we are astonished by the discovery, by-and-by, that our heart-strings have mysteriously attached themselves to the City, and are drawing us thitherward again as if it were more familiar, more intimately our home than even the spot where we were born!³

This tour de force of a sentence (which opens Chapter 36 of Hawthorne's story) heaps up a catalogue of vividly realized physical discomforts and more nebulously expressed moral and spiritual anxieties. Yet still Rome, always already familiar (as Hare emphasizes in the introduction to his guide), exercises indefinable powers of attraction.⁴ The frustration, visceral disgust, fascination, and wonder this city calls forth from the educated Protestant visitor are breathlessly evoked. Hawthorne's novel, the principal focus of my essay, offers a striking instance of—and model for—the complex responses of the Protestant, perhaps especially American Protestant, to the experience of Rome as a place.

In Hawthorne's narrative the conflicted comments quoted above are apparently intended to articulate the feelings of Kenyon, one of the book's

³ 2002, 254 (all page references are to the Oxford World's Classics edition of Hawthorne). Quoted in the 1900 edition of Hare, vol. I 3–4.

⁴ Such a conflicted engagement with Rome as a place, its role as metaphorical "home," perhaps appealed particularly to Hare; he himself was born in Rome but taken from it at a very early youth, only returning to the city with his severely evangelical adoptive mother many years later. See Edwards 2008.

central characters, an American artist living temporarily in Rome;⁵ they rework closely observations recorded by Hawthorne in the diaries written while he and his family were in the city for an extended stay from 1858–9.⁶ These diaries document at length Hawthorne's disgust at Rome's squalor and inconveniences, the perceived moral failings of its inhabitants, the practices of the Catholic Church—as well as his sometimes anxious, sometimes admiring responses to the splendors of Rome's art and architecture. His experiences are drawn on extensively in *The Marble Faun* (indeed forty-five out of fifty chapters include at least some material, largely unchanged, from the notebooks).⁷

The Marble Faun's characters visit the Colosseum by moonlight, and wander in the Borghese gardens. They speculate about the sculptures in the Capitoline museum. They are overwhelmed by the architecture of the Pantheon. They look at their reflections in the Trevi fountain, admire the view from the Pincio⁸—and feel disgust at the constant juxtaposition of beauty and squalor offered in the streets of the city: “Everywhere some fragment of a ruin, suggesting the magnificence of a former epoch; everywhere moreover a Cross—and nastiness at the foot of it” (2002, 87). Rome as a place is repulsive and yet at the same time entirely compelling. The characters in Hawthorne's novel roam about the city. But other kinds of Roman error, most notably the multiple errors of Roman Catholicism and the violence and religious error of pagan antiquity, also permeate his narrative. And the errors of Rome turn out to be disconcertingly implicated in the city's aesthetic potency.

Published simultaneously in the United Kingdom and the United States, *The Marble Faun* was a hybrid novel and travel book (in this respect, and in others, a successor to Germaine de Staël's *Corinne*

⁵ Kenyon, at this point in the novel, has been absent in Tuscany, while his beloved Hilda has remained in Rome but the power of Rome as a place is also at issue here, as Hare's deployment of the passage underlines.

⁶ These are published as *French and Italian notebooks* (1980). Hawthorne himself, returning to his Roman lodgings after some time in Tuscany, felt Rome more like home than any other place (Oct. 1858), 1980, 488. Hawthorne, after a period in England as Liverpool's U.S. consul (1853–7), spent over a year travelling in France and Italy. On Hawthorne's career, see Miller 1991; Swann 1991.

⁷ His British publisher Smith, Elder specialized in three-volume novels for libraries, prompting expansion beyond short-story format with which Hawthorne's practice was more comfortable (see Manning in Hawthorne 2002, xvi–xvii).

⁸ Description of the view from Pincian Hill, 2002, 83–4; extensive descriptions of the Capitoline museum (chs. 1–2), the catacombs (chs. 3–4), and the Pantheon (ch. 50).

of 1807).⁹ This hybridity was troubling for some critics, notably Henry James and Leslie Stephen.¹⁰ Yet, while the combination of narrative and touristic description did not appeal to all readers, many valued the novel (whose sales figures far exceeded those of Hawthorne's earlier works) as an engaging traveling companion.¹¹ James himself referred to the novel as "part of the intellectual equipment of the Anglo-Saxon visitor to Rome" and a kind of "manual of Roman sites and impressions" that would "long, on the great sentimental journey, continue to peep out of most pockets" (James 1984, 444).¹² According to *The Times*, it was "worth all the guide books we ever met with" (Crowley 1970, 330). As Broadhead comments: "it formed part of a cultural apparatus telling others how they should see the sights of Rome" (1990, xxvii).

The Marble Faun, then, whether consumed from cover to cover or excerpted in Hare's *Walks in Rome*, molded many visitors' responses to Rome as a place and inflected their relationships with the Rome of antiquity, serving also to enmesh these relationships ever more tightly with responses to the Rome of Catholicism. The view of Roman error offered in Hawthorne's book instantiates and reinforces a particular Protestant, perhaps American Protestant, understanding of Rome; this is a city profoundly corrupted by a myriad of slaughters, weltering in its old crimes, a city with no future.¹³ The term "error," taken in various connected senses, frequently recurs. The characters often go astray in their ramblings through the city. The figure of the labyrinth haunts the narrative, particularly in relation to the catacombs.¹⁴ Dante's *Inferno* is invoked and, though Vergil is not explicitly mentioned, his labyrinth of

⁹ In the U.K. it was published under the title of *Transformation*. On travelers' engagement with Rome via *Corinne*, see Buzard 1993, 110–13; Chard 1999, esp. 136–44; Edwards 2012. On the relationship between *Corinne* and *The Marble Faun* see Buzard 1993, 168–9.

¹⁰ James Hawthorne 1879 (included in James 1984). Reviewing Hawthorne's work in 1872, James comments, "he was exquisitely and consistently provincial" (1984, 430). See Buzard 1993, 231–3.

¹¹ For the sales figures, see Hawthorne 1968, xxviii–xxx. U.S. visitors to Rome numbered about 3,000 in 1860 rising to around 30,000 by 1900 (Broadhead 1990, xiii).

¹² On Hawthorne and later visitors to Rome, see also Vance 1989, II 423–4.

¹³ Henry James indeed, commenting on Hawthorne's lack of sophistication in his response to art, termed him "the last of the earlier race of Americans" (1984, 442).

¹⁴ The city as a labyrinth: 2002, 321, 354, (Miriam experiences its "crookedness") 158; the catacombs as a labyrinth: 2002, 24, 74, 331. Cf. the labyrinth as implicit figure for the human mind: 2002, 257.

Daedalus, which features early in Book 6 of the *Aeneid* (thus serving as a prelude to the account of Aeneas' visit to the underworld) is several times hinted at.¹⁵ Hawthorne's Rome is a city of the dead, a place thronged with ghosts, from which it may be difficult to escape.¹⁶

Religion played an increasingly prominent role in nineteenth-century engagements with Rome.¹⁷ Protestant visitors to the city still enthused about the ruins of the ancients but also reveled in the morally uplifting pleasures of what Dominic Janes terms the "anti-pilgrimage," expressing fascinated horror at pagan persecution of the Christians and at the perceived doctrinal and aesthetic errors of Roman Catholicism (2012, 224). *The Marble Faun* (though less extreme than some other Protestant texts in its critique of Catholicism) offers a complex, if not always entirely coherent, view of the interrelationship of ancient and more modern Roman religious errors.¹⁸ Exploring the city on foot, losing one's way in sometimes threatening, sometimes beguiling byways, allowed the Protestant visitor to experience this ambivalence keenly, even physically.

The Roman catacombs, which, in the context of the intense religious debates of the nineteenth century, had become an increasingly popular tourist attraction, serve as an emblem of perilous wandering.¹⁹ In the novel, a terrifying encounter takes place in the catacombs of St. Calixtus. Hawthorne's atmospheric treatment of this scene intertwines the gothic thrill of subterranean exploration (incautious visitors might lose themselves forever, it was rumored) with the exemplary error of pagan

¹⁵ Dante is mentioned, 2002, 196, 239. Hawthorne would certainly have been familiar with the *Aeneid*, a key element in the Bowdoin curriculum in the 1820s (Miller 1991, 64). On Vergil's figure of the labyrinth see Fitzgerald 1984.

¹⁶ "The very ghosts . . . have so much density" (2002, 124). Miriam and her tormentor pass one another "like ghosts" (2002, 75).

¹⁷ Goldhill has recently reminded us of the critical place of religion in nineteenth-century engagements with Rome ancient and modern (2011, 6–9). Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the portrayal in numerous histories and historical novels of Jews as more hostile to Christians than are the pagans. On the role of religion in nineteenth-century historical novels set in Rome, see also Turner 1999.

¹⁸ See Vance 1989 vol. 2 for American responses to Catholic Rome more generally.

¹⁹ Little visited by travelers in the eighteenth century, the excavated area of the catacombs had been significantly expanded during the Napoleonic occupation and increasingly featured in the itinerary of nineteenth-century tourists. James Spencer Northcote's English-language guide to the catacombs *The Roman catacombs; or, some account of the burial-places of the early Christians in Rome*, was published in 1857. Interest in the catacombs had been much stimulated by the writings of Cardinal Wiseman, particularly his novel *Fabiola* of 1855 (Janes 2012).

resistance to Christianity. Rome's depths—crypts, chasms, and graves as well as catacombs—are a recurrent preoccupation throughout the novel. Lurking, too, in Hawthorne's gloomy Roman subconscious are other kinds of error, the error of the Jews notably—and, perhaps most thoroughly repressed, the error of slavery, ancient and modern.

Also prominent, however, is "error" in the sense of a specific sin or crime. One key event generates feelings of overwhelming guilt in three of the four characters. Rome as a place, imbued with the errors of the past, predisposes people to err, it seems. Late in the novel, when the New Englander Kenyon is searching Rome for his compatriot Hilda he imagines the worst:

What localities for new crime existed in those guilty sites, where the crime of departed ages used to be at home, and had its long hereditary haunt! What street in Rome, what ancient ruin, what one place where man has standing-room, what fallen stone was there, unstained by one or another kind of guilt! (2002, 320)

A little earlier, Kenyon addresses the Italian Donatello: "You should go with me to my native country . . . In that fortunate land, each generation has only its own sins and sorrows to bear. Here, it seems as if all the weary and dreary Past were piled on the back of the Present" (2002, 236). In Rome, the past cannot stay buried.

The story focuses on four characters. Two of these are young New Englanders: Hilda, an artist ("pretty . . . in our native New England style," and very conscious of her own Puritan heritage),²⁰ and Kenyon, a sculptor of rather chilly demeanor.²¹ The third, Miriam, is also an artist; conspicuously beautiful, she speaks with an English accent but the name she goes under—Miriam Schaefer—is apparently not her own.²² Early in the novel she hints that she suffers from a heavy "burthen on the heart."²³ The fourth character, Donatello, is an Italian of simple and open disposition, who has spent most of his life on his ancestral estate in the Tuscan hills—and bears a striking resemblance to the marble faun of Praxiteles, a work admired by the group on the visit to the Capitoline museum with which

²⁰ 2002, 50, cf. 85; her virginal attributes are further highlighted 44, 88, 129, 158.

²¹ He does not welcome Miriam's impulse to confide in him (2002, 100; cf. 336).

²² Her name: 2002, 8, 32; her accent: 85.

²³ 2002, 13. She comments unguardedly (before the death of the Model), "I should be content . . . if I could only forget one day of all my life" (14).

the book opens. Later in the novel Hawthorne alludes to the antiquity of Donatello's family: "the line was supposed to have had its origin, in the sylvan life of Etruria, while Italy was yet guiltless of Rome."²⁴

Kenyon loves Hilda (though has not yet declared himself), while Donatello is devoted to Miriam. But Miriam is also dogged by a mysterious and sinister figure, initially identified as an artists' model, who has occasionally sat for her.²⁵ An encounter with this man, as she wandered, separated from her companions, in the catacombs of St. Calixtus, seems to have given him some hold over Miriam; a dark secret (never fully disclosed) binds them together, which may indeed relate to the deeper past (2002, 21). The model is a kind of dark counterpart to Donatello, a satyr to his faun. He is "the last survivor of that vanished race, hiding himself in sepulchral gloom and mourning over his lost life of woods and streams."²⁶ After the encounter in the catacombs, the model slinks around in the shadows of the city, occasionally revealing himself to the terrified Miriam (Chapter 11 offers a deliberately sketchy account of their encounter in the Borghese gardens). She hints darkly to her friends of her misery but never shares her secret.

Miriam's passionate hatred of her tormentor is, it seems, manifested in her art; in her studio Donatello finds a sketch of Jael driving a nail through the temples of Sisera ("dashed off with remarkable power . . . as if she herself were Jael"), another of Judith with the head of Holofernes (a little later Miriam herself is compared to Judith), and another of Salome receiving the head of John the Baptist. All these images of biblical violence also convey the remorse felt by their female protagonists.²⁷ Miriam sees death as the only way out (2002, 73, 75). She is tempted to

²⁴ 2002, 181. The passage goes on to claim that, according to myth, the Monte Beni family had their origins in the Pelasgic race who peopled Italy in prehistoric times. "It was the same noble breed of men of Asiatic birth, that settled in Greece; the same happy and poetic kindred who dwelt in Arcadia, and—whether they ever lived such a life or not—enriched the world with dreams, at least and fables, lovely, if insubstantial, of a Golden Age" (2002, 181). Chapter 27 suggests one of Donatello's ancestors was not altogether human. On the association of Arcadia with the childhood of humanity in Hawthorne's work, see Staley 2013a.

²⁵ 2002, 17. In Chapter 21, it is made clear he was a Capuchin monk.

²⁶ 2002, 25. Donatello later describes himself as "the last" of his race (172).

²⁷ 2002, 35–6. Miriam's self-portrait is said to resemble a young Judith, 2002, 39.

kill herself; she wants the model dead.²⁸ Kenyon witnesses from a distance a fraught encounter between Miriam and the model:

Free as she seemed to be—beggar as he looked—the nameless vagrant must then be dragging the beautiful Miriam through the streets of Rome, fettered and shackled more cruelly than any captive queen of yore, following in an Emperor's triumph. And was it conceivable she could have been thus enthralled, unless some great error . . . or some fatal weakness, had given this dark adversary a vantage ground? (2002, 85)

Her tormentor here is figured as embodying the cruelty of pagan Roman power, while Miriam is compared to a conquered queen (foreshadowing the description of Cleopatra's statue, presented, a few pages later, as the creation of Kenyon—though more particularly taking its inspiration from Harriet Hosmer's *Zenobia* of 1859, representing the captive queen of Palmyra).²⁹

Eventually, after a long moonlit ramble among the monuments of Rome, Miriam and Donatello find themselves alone by the Tarpeian rock (whence in antiquity traitors were pushed to their deaths). Yet again, however, the model looms into view. Donatello, in his devotion to Miriam, sees from her look how much she wishes the model dead—and pushes him off the precipice.³⁰ Donatello, hitherto characterized by his innocence and playfulness (he is endlessly compared to a devoted pet dog),³¹ is transformed by this episode. Miriam feels relief at the model's death but realizes she will always bear the guilt of inciting Donatello's crime. The deed, it transpires, was witnessed by the virtuous Hilda, who, horrified, now cuts herself off from Miriam. Miriam disappears from Rome; Donatello retreats to Tuscany, where Kenyon visits him. Miriam, it turns out, has followed Donatello and they are eventually reunited to share their penitence. Donatello resolves to confess his guilt to the authorities and is committed to prison (2002, 362). Kenyon and Hilda, brought closer by these events, catch a final glimpse of Miriam in the

²⁸ "I foresee the end, and have already warned you of it. It will be death" (2002, 75). Later, however, it is made clear that Miriam would not kill herself "in earthly difficulties" (2002, 335).

²⁹ 2002, 91; chapter 14. The figure of Miriam in chains is elaborated at 72–3. On the controversy surrounding Hosmer's *Zenobia*, see Cherry 2000, ch. 4.

³⁰ Though Miriam had twice before urged him not to attack the model (2002, 71, 114).

³¹ He is like a "pet dog" 2002, 14; docile and playful as a "pet spaniel," 35; "greyhound," 64; "a faithful hound," 115; "a hound," 122.

Pantheon (what becomes of her subsequently is not made clear). They have been in Rome long enough and return together to their native land—to live happily ever after.³²

The nature of Miriam's original error is never spelled out. Her past is mysterious. She has chosen Rome as a place where she can live independently, incognito. Only here is such ambiguity in a young woman socially acceptable (2002, 18). There are those who believe that she "had fled from her home to escape a union with a cousin" much desired by her family (at a late point in the novel, indeed, the model seems to be assimilated to this cousin—though he is also described as hundreds of years old, 2002, 334). Some of her own later comments seem to confirm this. Miriam's independence of mind made the prospect of this pre-arranged union odious to her; Hawthorne goes on to underline the terrible character of the betrothed, "so evil, so treacherous, so wild." But it seems hard to imagine blame would attach to Miriam for resisting such a marriage. And other versions also circulate (2002, 20; 360–2). She is suspected of involvement in a crime. Though she is innocent she cannot prove it and has assumed a false identity, which the model is threatening to reveal.³³ None of these explanations accounts fully for the horror Miriam seems to feel at her situation.³⁴ Miriam alludes to "a mysterious and terrible event" (2002, 334). Many contemporary readers found the mystery too tantalizing and obliged Hawthorne to write a postscript (which, as critics note, does little to resolve the uncertainty).³⁵

A key role in the novel is played by a portrait said to be of Beatrice Cenci, and attributed to Guido Reni.³⁶ Hilda has made a copy of this picture, "the very saddest picture ever painted or conceived" (2002, 51). The expression on Beatrice's face prompts much discussion between Hilda and Miriam. Beatrice Cenci (1577–99) was found guilty of plotting with other family members to murder her father, who had allegedly

³² They decide to return home (2002, 357).

³³ "With one word, he could have blasted me, in the belief of the world" (2002, 335–6).

³⁴ "The shadow fell upon me innocent but I went astray in it . . . and wandered into crime" (2002, 334).

³⁵ For contemporary responses, see Crowley 1970.

³⁶ Cf. Hawthorne's description written in May 1859 (1980, 520–1). The picture (Galeria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Palazzo Barberini) is no longer attributed to Reni (Hawthorne 1980, 746–7).

sought incestuous relations with her (though Hawthorne does not explicitly refer to the alleged incest).³⁷ Is she innocent or guilty? How far does experience, knowledge of sin, itself confer guilt?³⁸ For Hilda, she has committed “an inexpressible crime,” while Miriam exclaims: “I would give my life to know whether she thought herself innocent or the one great criminal since time began.” When Miriam looks at the painting, Hilda is alarmed to see her friend’s expression “had become almost exactly that of the portrait.”³⁹ At least one critic has seen a more particular resonance between Miriam and Beatrice, suggesting incest as a plausible, if never fully acknowledged, explanation for Miriam’s feeling of horror at her own past (Greenwald 1991). There is perhaps also a sense in which Miriam herself, with her alien religious heritage, her tainted past, her artistic power, her passion and her beauty, figures for Rome itself.⁴⁰

Americans were living in Rome in increasing numbers in the middle years of the nineteenth century. The novel includes a portrait of the community of foreign artists, who made their home in the city. During his months in Rome, Hawthorne himself had come to know artists and sculptors such as Harriet Hosmer,⁴¹ Maria Louisa Lander, Paul Akers, and William Wetmore Story.⁴² As his preface makes clear he “borrows” several artworks of Akers and Story (such as Story’s *Cleopatra*) to serve as the works of his novel’s sculptor, Kenyon (2002, 5). In the novel, Rome offers freedom to artists, in particular, freedom from their neighbors’ curiosity: “In these particulars, the papal despotism allows us freer breath than our native air,” Hawthorne observes. This freedom is especially

³⁷ Shelley, who saw the picture in 1818, was inspired to compose a play, *The Cenci* (1819). It was not performed until 1922, however, because of its concern with incest and parricide. Hawthorne’s contemporary, the sculptor Harriet Hosmer, also produced a version of Beatrice Cenci (see Rowe in this volume).

³⁸ Hilda later acquires “the dismal certainty of the experience of evil” and is herself compared to Beatrice Cenci (2002, 256–7, 258). On moral choice in Hawthorne’s novel in terms of innocence and experience, see Budick 2004.

³⁹ 2002, 53. See Greenwald 1991.

⁴⁰ In this respect, as in others, Hawthorne’s novel echoes aspects of Stäel’s *Corinne*, whose eponymous heroine, passionate, gifted, and independent, figures for Italy, or perhaps rather Italy’s potential as a nation.

⁴¹ Hosmer’s work is referred to (2002, 94). She was in Rome from 1852. Her works included a statue of Zenobia (1859).

⁴² On this coterie, see Baker 1964; Vance 1989.

valuable to women artists, who, he notes, may live alone without incurring suspicion.⁴³

All artists aspire to come to Rome, it seems, thirsting to engage with the paintings of the Old Masters, as well as the sculptures of antiquity, not to mention the ruins of the empire and the churches of later centuries. Yet Hawthorne's narrative often suggests the experience may not be an entirely positive one; new creativity, he contends, at least in the realm of the visual arts, may be overwhelmed rather than stimulated by its encounter with old (this was a theme which would later preoccupy Henry James, most notably in his 1875 novel *Roderick Hudson*).⁴⁴

"Had Hilda remained in her own country, it is not improbable that she might have produced original works" but "since her arrival in the pictorial land, Hilda seemed to have entirely lost the impulse of original design." Awed by Rome's wealth of art, Hilda turns to copying Old Masters, which she does with particular brilliance, catching their spirit: "she wrought religiously . . . sacrificing herself to the devout recognition of the highest excellence in art" (2002, 45, 48).⁴⁵ She serves as the handmaid of Raphael.⁴⁶ Yet the apparently critical nature of comments about her loss of originality is problematized by a later remark, dismissing the kind of original picture she might have produced, if she'd stayed at home: "pretty fancies of snow and moonlight; the counter-part in picture, of so many feminine achievements in literature!" (2002, 49).⁴⁷

⁴³ 2002, 85–6. See further his comments on Hilda (2002, 44) and Miriam (85; cf. 95). As well as the sculptors Harriet Hosmer and Maria Lousia Lander, another American woman who had sought freedom to pursue her career in Italy was Margaret Fuller, a friend of Sophia from her youth in Boston. In Italy from 1847 to 1850 she lived with an Italian Ossoli and was involved in Mazzini's short-lived Roman republic of 1849 (Vance 1989, I 21–2). See Rowe in this volume for her influence on Henry James.

⁴⁴ The relationship between *The Marble Faun* and *Roderick Hudson* is perceptively discussed in Tony Tanner's introduction to the latter (James 1980, xii–xv).

⁴⁵ Hilda's experience of suffering as a result of witnessing her friends' crime initially makes her lose interest in art. Later, after confession eases her burden, she returns to copying—but is never so skilled a copyist as before (291). Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, Nathaniel's wife, was a keen copier of Old Masters (Hawthorne 1980, 905).

⁴⁶ At one point Hilda seems to lose her taste for Italian religious art, prizing only the realism of Flemish art (2002, 262–3). The novel later casts doubt on the value of the Old Masters: "How could Holiness be revealed to the artists of an age when the greatest of them put genius and imagination in the place of spiritual insight, and when, from the Pope downward, all Christendom was corrupt!" (291–2).

⁴⁷ We might contrast the comments made elsewhere on the wholesomeness of needlework, 32–3.

This is not just a matter of gender, however. Hawthorne is also ambivalent about Kenyon's work, offering sweeping criticisms of modern sculptors in general, as lacking originality in their subject matter, reliant on Italian artisans to turn their clay models into marble form, and altogether too full of themselves.⁴⁸ Hawthorne seems to celebrate the way these foreign artists live in Rome: "In every other clime they are isolated strangers; in this Land of Art they are free citizens." Yet he often appears less than convinced by their art, observing that while they linger in Italy, their "originality dies out of them" (2002, 102; 103). Of a British sculptor we are told: "he had foregone to be a Christian reality, and perverted himself into pagan idealist" (2002, 104).⁴⁹ As Tony Tanner comments, "it is impossible to detect any stable aesthetic maintained by the book."⁵⁰

Hawthorne's earlier work (most obviously *The Scarlet Letter*, 1850) insistently explored the psychology of Puritan ideas of guilt, punishment, and penitence. In *The Marble Faun*, the flawed nature of Catholicism is, unsurprisingly, a recurrent theme; several chapters dwell at length on the limitations of Catholic conceptions of penitence, or of charity.⁵¹ Hawthorne also finds some things to praise in Catholic practice (Hilda tends a shrine to the Virgin; she sees the comfort of confession, though, as a good Puritan, she denies the priest power to absolve).⁵² The religion of pagan antiquity also has its engaging aspect. The narrator invokes the cult of Bacchus and appeals to ideas of the Golden Age, of Arcadia,

⁴⁸ These comments are concentrated in ch. 13 "A sculptor's studio," ch. 14 "Cleopatra," and ch. 15 "An aesthetic company." Hawthorne notes that much of the work on marble is done by Italian craftsmen (2002, 90). More generally he observes that sculptors are overrated (90); they have "no new subjects" (97).

Such comments are very much in line with the standard tropes of mid-nineteenth-century art criticism (see the discussion in Droth, Edwards, and Hatt 2014: 26–7). An insightful analysis of this debate, particularly as it related to the sculptor Harriet Hosmer, is offered by Cherry 2000, ch. 4.

⁴⁹ Miriam comments: "An artist . . . cannot sculpture nudity with a pure heart, if only because he is compelled to steal guilty glimpses of hired models" (2002, 96). Cf. 105, 188 and, on nudity in painting, 263. Hawthorne himself seems to have been somewhat horrified by a bust of him created by the American sculptor Maria Louisa Lander, which included his nude upper chest. See Rowe in this volume.

⁵⁰ Introduction to James 1980, xv. Manning suggests that the damaged state of what Hawthorne and others came to observe in Rome becomes a metaphor for their decayed relationship to its significance (Hawthorne 2002, xxxiv).

⁵¹ Ch. 29; superiority of Protestant penitence 2002, 209; Catholicism used to be genuine, 237; Roman priests, 319–20.

⁵² Many of its ends are admirable (2002, 268). Cf. more generally ch. 38. Hawthorne's novel is less condemning of Catholicism than are many other Protestant accounts.

particularly in characterizing the idyllic life led by Donatello among the Tuscan hills.⁵³ But this vision of ancient religion is explicitly associated with Italy before Rome.

Though there is some discussion of statues of ancient divinities as aesthetic objects, little consideration is given to the religion of ancient Rome as a city and empire.⁵⁴ Nevertheless a critical aspect of the guilt of ancient Rome is the Romans' error in refusing Christianity. This lost opportunity is dramatized in the story of Memmius, a pagan spy in the catacombs in the time of Diocletian's persecution. Through divine mercy, Memmius was allowed a moment's grace: "But he resisted the sacred impulse . . . the light of the consecrated tapers, which represent all truth, bewildered the wretched man with everlasting error, and the blessed Cross itself was stamped as a seal upon his heart, so that it should never open to receive conviction" (2002, 27–8). Thereafter Memmius wanders the catacombs looking to beguile others into his own error or looking to be led out into the light—but only with the purpose of committing an evil deed against his benefactor or possibly "teaching the modern world some decayed and dusty kind of crime which the antique Romans knew" (2002, 28).⁵⁵ We are being offered a supernatural explanation for the novel's events, it seems (is it the ghost of Memmius which haunts Miriam?)—though Hawthorne also raises the possibility that this is a "monstrous fiction." Nevertheless a later chapter suggests of the model: "In this man's memory there was something that made it awful for him to think of prayer; nor could any torture be more intolerable than to be reminded of such divine comfort as awaits pious souls merely for the asking" (2002, 74).⁵⁶ In assimilating Memmius to a satyr (like the faun, associated with pre-Roman, rustic Italy) and linking his imprisonment in the catacombs to his resistance to Christianity,

⁵³ Glimpses of this life are offered, as he gambols about the Borghese gardens with Miriam; the city itself is not Donatello's natural element (2002, 62; cf. 69, 215, 228). Later the wine from Donatello's Tuscan estate is described as "the wine of the Golden Age, such as Bacchus himself first taught mankind to press" (174).

⁵⁴ On the newly discovered statue of Venus, ch. 46.

⁵⁵ The phantom's victim is to be bound to him forever if she does not succeed in convincing him of his errors in twelve months (2002, 29).

⁵⁶ Similarly in the Colosseum, when the model visits the shrines, "It struck Kenyon . . . that the suppliant was merely performing an enjoined penance, and without the penitence that ought to have given it effectual life" (2002, 123). Yet it later transpires, as noted above, that the model is a Capuchin monk.

Hawthorne seems to collapse all the history of pagan Rome into that one moment.

Perhaps less predictably, the novel also concerns itself with Judaism (Greenwald 1991). Miriam's appearance is early on marked as Jewish and later she refers explicitly to her Jewish background (2002, 39–40).⁵⁷ The images in Miriam's studio include one of Salome, who successfully demanded the head of John the Baptist, an instance not only of female, but also of Jewish, violence against one of the first followers of Christ. Already, before the death of the model, Miriam feels a guilt that is not fully articulated. "Men have said that this white hand had once a crimson stain," says the model (2002, 76). Does this hint, on one level, at a more generalized Jewish guilt? The guilt of the Jews in calling for the crucifixion of Jesus was a recurring theme of evangelical debates and the burgeoning missionary movement of the early nineteenth century.⁵⁸ Jewish error is perhaps more obviously associated with the model himself, who bears a close resemblance to the cursed figure of the Wandering Jew, the subject of a novel of 1828 by the Evangelical George Croly, *Salathiel, a story of past, present and future*, very successful in its time (and reprinted in 1851 and 1858), though now almost completely forgotten.⁵⁹ The protagonist led the cry for the crucifixion of Christ, felt immediate remorse, but was then cursed to wander until the second coming of Christ. Like Salathiel, the model is apparently hundreds of years old—and under a curse.⁶⁰ In the *English Notebooks* Hawthorne expresses admiration for a beautiful English Jewish woman on whom Miriam seems to be modeled (the account of Miriam's appearance closely echoes Hawthorne's description of this English woman). Yet he also expresses repugnance for her husband in revealing terms, describing him as "the distilled essence of all the Jews that have been since Jacob's time; he was Judas Iscariot; he was the Wandering Jew; he was the worst, and at the same time the truest type of his race" (1997, 320–1).⁶¹

⁵⁷ Cf. Miriam's comments at 333.

⁵⁸ Relevant here is the controversy surrounding attempts to relieve Jews of civil disabilities in the 1820s to the 1850s, on which see Cheyette and Valman 2004; Feldman 1994.

⁵⁹ Discussed by Goldhill 2011, 235–7.

⁶⁰ The model is like Guido's demon (2002, 108–9). He "lived and sinned before the time of Trajan" (117). He is more than 1,500 years old (123).

⁶¹ Discussed by Greenwald (1991). In Hawthorne's "A Virtuoso's Collection" and "Ethan Brand" (1852) the Wandering Jew serves as a guide to the stories' characters.

In the model, then, Hawthorne seems to conflate Jew and pagan Roman—at least in their relation to Christianity, implying perhaps a more general conflation of the error of the Jews in calling for the crucifixion and the error of the pagan Romans in persecuting the Christians, and that of both in refusing the illumination offered by the Christian god. Late on in the novel, Hilda is obliged to visit the Ghetto, where Rome's Jewish population lives in overcrowded and crumbling tenements.

It is a question of speculative interest whether the ancient Romans were as unclean a people as those who have succeeded them. There appears to be a kind of malignant spell in the spots that have been inhabited by these masters of the world, or made famous in their history; an inherited and inalienable curse, impelling their successors to fling dirt and defilement upon . . . every monument that the old Romans built. It is most probably a classic trait, regularly transmitted downward, and perhaps a little modified by the better civilization of Christianity; so that Caesar may have trod narrower and filthier ways, in his path to the Capitol, than even those of modern Rome. (2002, 302)

The tone is hard to gauge here. In imagining the dirty streets traversed by Julius Caesar, Hawthorne may be anticipating the facetious juxtapositions of high and low which characterize Mark Twain's satirical travel writing.⁶² This may also constitute a more earnest attempt to conjure up the texture of a very distant epoch. Yet the slippage between the present-day Jewish inhabitants and those, pagan or Jew, who lived in the city in ancient times hints at a different, perhaps more alien, Rome than the familiar world of Julius Caesar and Horace.

Certainly the novel evinces a recurrent concern with the guilt of bloodshed, pervading Roman history. Nineteenth-century Protestant visitors seem to have taken a certain pleasure in musing on the guilt of pagan Rome. Sophia Peabody Hawthorne (wife of Nathaniel) looked at Rome and thought of "the six thousand crucified men of Crassus," an allusion to the punishment of the slave uprising led by Spartacus.⁶³ Moralizing effusions are especially evident in relation to the Colosseum, which was widely supposed to be a site of Christian martyrdom, as well

⁶² In *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), Twain evokes, for instance, a bathetically anachronistic picture of games at the Colosseum (1996, 277–83).

⁶³ *Notes in Italy and England* (1869). The Spartacus story was increasingly popular in this period. See, for instance, R. Bird *The Gladiator* (1831).

as gladiatorial combat.⁶⁴ Copies of Jean Léon Gérôme's *We Who Are About to Die Salute You* (1859) were hugely popular at this time, while innumerable popular romances and stage productions featured the terrible fate of the Christian martyrs.⁶⁵

Bloodshed in the Colosseum is already present in the opening moments of *The Marble Faun*. The first piece of Capitoline-museum sculpture mentioned is the so-called "Dying Gladiator" (a work celebrated in Byron's poetry and one of the best-known sculptures in Rome).⁶⁶ The Colosseum itself may be seen from the museum's window. The "Dying Gladiator" is recalled when the artists make their inevitable trip to the Colosseum by moonlight.⁶⁷ After musing on the bloodshed in the Colosseum, Kenyon goes on to observe: "Fancy a nightly assemblage of eight thousand melancholy and remorseful ghosts, looking down from those tiers of broken arches, striving to repent of the savage pleasures which they once enjoyed, but still longing to enjoy them all over again!" (2002, 28) At this stage in the narrative, Kenyon (like many other Protestant visitors) appears to savor contemplating the guilty pagan past from the moral high ground of the more civilized Christian present.

The novel occasionally asserts the familiarity of ancient Rome—intimate as we are with classical literature, we seem to know it better than the Rome of the Middle Ages (is this perhaps one sense in which Rome constitutes a kind of "home"?).⁶⁸ Yet the particular detail of pagan history is set aside. Indeed "history" is explicitly rejected as something

⁶⁴ Vance 1989, I 48–53; Hopkins and Beard 2005, 103–6. A few years earlier Charles Dickens expressed the intensity of his own emotion, as he imagined: "thousands of eager faces staring down into the arena, and such a whirl of strife, and blood, and dust, going on there is no language can describe." (*Pictures from Italy* [1846] 1996, 117–18). The cruelties of pagan antiquity were regularly compared to those of Catholic inquisition, as Vance notes (1989, I 52–3). See e.g. Grace Greenwood, *Haps and mishaps on a tour of Europe* (1852).

⁶⁵ This painting was one of several by Gérôme bought or commissioned by Americans (Vance 1989, I 48–54).

⁶⁶ The statue is now usually referred to as "The Dying Gaul." Mark Twain jokes that he is the first visitor to the Colosseum who has resisted the temptation to declaim Byron's famous line: "butcher'd to make a Roman holyday" (1996, 284).

⁶⁷ 2002, 120. The monument is visible from Kenyon's window (2002, 116).

⁶⁸ 2002, 127. As a student at Bowdoin (1821–5), Hawthorne had studied classical literature: "I was educated (as the phrase is) at Bowdoin College. I was an idle student, negligent of college rules and the Procrustean details of academic life, rather choosing to nurse my own fancies than to dig into Greek roots and be numbered among the learned Thebans" (quoted in Miller 1991, 76). There are a handful of references to classical authors in *The Marble Faun*, e.g. Horace (2002, 241).

“with which our narrative is not concerned.”⁶⁹ There is a strong sense that any detailed engagement with the history of pagan Rome would suck life out of the characters in the story Hawthorne seeks to unfold. Having said a little about the arch of Titus (commemorating that emperor’s triumph over the Jews), Hawthorne then comments:

It is politic, however, to make few allusions to such a Past; nor, if we would create an interest in the characters of our story, is it wise to suggest how Cicero’s foot may have stepped on yonder stone, nor how Horace was wont to stroll near by, making his footsteps chime with the measure of the ode that was ringing in his mind. The very ghosts of that massive and stately epoch have so much density, that the actual people of today seem the thinner of the two, and stand more ghost-like by the arches and columns. (2002, 124)

This is a rather disconcerting moment; we are reminded of the status of Hawthorne’s narrative as a “Romance,” whose characters cannot command full credibility. Yet the novel’s emphasis on ambiguity, on conflicting narratives may also have implications for the apparently solid and familiar accounts of ancient Roman history.

Despite its familiarity, indeed, ancient Rome appears irremediably cut off from the modern visitor; a chasm lies between:

Rome, as it now exists, has grown up under the Popes, and seems like nothing but a heap of broken rubbish, thrown into the great chasm between our own days and the Empire, merely to fill it up; and, for the better part of two thousand years, its annals of obscure policies, and wars, and continually recurring misfortunes, seem also but broken rubbish, as compared with its classic history. If we consider the present city as at all connected with the famous one of old, it is only because we find it built over its grave . . . the dead corpse of a giant. (2002, 86)

Classic history is here apparently celebrated—though only indirectly through comparison with the rubbishy centuries that came after.⁷⁰ Yet the emphasis is on what separates us from it.

The figure of the chasm is especially important in Hawthorne’s narrative. A little after this passage, in the opening scene of Chapter 18 (entitled “On the edge of a precipice”) his characters are made to muse

⁶⁹ 2002, 79. Cf. 56–7. While a marble column may offer a tangible link to the past, this past is almost always unspecific, though, as well as the arch and activities of Titus, Trajan’s name and his campaigns are mentioned, as is Marcus Aurelius (2002, 128).

⁷⁰ For the preoccupation with rubbish, compare the almost contemporary novel of Henry P. Leland, *Americans in Rome* (1863), in which the hero rails against Rome as a rubbish heap (discussed by Vance 1989, I 30).

on what lies beneath the Rome they see. Kenyon asserts that they have found the very spot in the forum where the chasm opened into which Marcus Curtius, to save Rome, hurled himself and his horse. He alludes here, of course, to the well-known story (recounted in Livy's history, 7.6) that, when an oracle declared Rome could only be saved if its most treasured possession were thrown into the newly opened chasm, Curtius recognized that Rome had nothing more precious than its men and sacrificed himself.⁷¹ Kenyon finds the story tantalizing, speculating about the contents of the chasm: "Within it, beyond a question, there were prophetic visions—intimations of all the future calamities of Rome—shades of Goths and Gauls, and even of the French soldiers of today . . . I would give much for a peep into such a chasm." Kenyon's comments seem idle fantasy; calamities are something that happen to other nations.⁷²

Miriam, however, suggests we need only look within ourselves to find such a chasm: "every person takes a peep into it in moments of gloom and despondency; that is to say in his moments of deepest insight." When Hilda protests she "never peeped into it," Miriam's response reinforces the link between the darkness of the human heart and that of Roman civilization.

"Wait and it will open for you . . . The chasm was merely one of the orifices of that pit of blackness which lies beneath us everywhere. The firmest crust of human happiness is but a thin crust spread over it . . . It needs no earthquake to open the chasm . . . all Rome, you see, has been swallowed up in that gulf . . . All the armies and all the triumphs have marched into the great chasm." (2002, 125)

Hilda's reply rejects the idea that this relates to a universal aspect of humanity:

"It was the guilt of Rome, no doubt, that caused this gulf to open; and Curtius filled it up with his heroic self-sacrifice and patriotism, which was the best virtue that the old Romans knew. Every wrong thing makes the gulf deeper; every right one helps to fill it up. As the evil of Rome was far more than its good, the whole commonwealth finally sank into it, indeed, but of no original necessity." (2002, 126)

⁷¹ This was a story favored by visual artists of the mid-nineteenth century. John Martin's *Marcus Curtius* (c.1827) is now in the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, while Benjamin Haydon produced a *Marcus Curtius* in 1842 (Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter).

⁷² Later in the novel, he himself does confess a desire to throw himself from a high place: "this strange impulse of an evil spirit at your back, shoving you toward a precipice" (2002, 203).

Some pagan Romans behaved virtuously but more failed to embrace virtue. Their sins have been punished—the outcome of individual moral choices, though given Hawthorne's emphasis on the dangers of puritanism in his earlier work, we cannot assume he endorses Hilda's worldview here. The vision of the chasm is elaborated further. Kenyon goes on to fantasize "a mighty subterranean lake of gore," generated by the countless bloody crimes of ancient Rome (2002, 126). Into this pool flowed the blood from Caesar's wounds. Only a few pages later, the killing of the model is said to link Donatello and Miriam to Caesar's assassins (2002, 137).⁷³ They, too, it seems, have contributed to Rome's lake of blood. In this guilty city, the crimes of the present are inevitably connected with the crimes of the past.

If earlier a chasm had seemed to separate antiquity from the modern world, after the crime some characters appear to be on the further side of the gulf. Later in the narrative, when Hilda becomes aware of Miriam's involvement in the death of the model, "a great chasm opens" between the two of them (2002, 161). In the novel's final chapter, Kenyon and Hilda see Miriam in the Pantheon, the gesture of her hands both blesses and keeps them away: "as if Miriam stood on the other side of a fathomless abyss, and warned them from its verge" (2002, 357). Miriam, beautiful but tainted, is closer to the Rome of antiquity than to her young Christian friends, it seems.⁷⁴

What of Donatello? Following the death of the model at the end of Chapter 18, Chapter 19 is entitled "The faun's transformation."⁷⁵ Donatello is consumed with guilt at having killed the model, but this seems to prompt a process of maturation. From being an animal presence, taking delight only in the moment, Donatello is now conscious of the past—and the future. "Out of his bitter agony, a soul and intellect . . . have been inspired into him" (2002, 221).⁷⁶ He no longer resembles the faun of Praxiteles; Kenyon observes "something lost or something gained, he

⁷³ The "scent of blood" is evoked by the words, which pass between Miriam and the model (2002, 76).

⁷⁴ Abysses proliferate. When Kenyon wonders if sin can educate, Hilda says: "I dare not follow you into the unfathomable abyss" (2002, 337).

⁷⁵ This aspect of the story seems to be highlighted by the novel's title on first publication in the U.K., *Transformation*.

⁷⁶ Earlier he knew no principle of virtue (2002, 10).

hardly knew which" (2002, 169).⁷⁷ He comes to know "the novelty of sin and grief" (2002, 157). Kenyon speaks of his fortunate fall: "Sin has educated Donatello, and elevated him" (2002, 356).⁷⁸ If Tuscany is like Eden after the Fall (2002, 215), then Donatello is an Adam who can no longer enjoy its pleasures but who does now have knowledge of good and evil. There is a sense in which his experience models for a universal one.⁷⁹ When Donatello grieves for his lost connection with the natural world, Kenyon sees this as a manifestation of the passage to adulthood: "It is the price we pay for experience"; "sin, care and self-consciousness have set the world askew" (2002, 195, 186). The sylvan world of the faun is a childlike world. Rome, in its weariness a place of experience as opposed to innocence, is emblematic of the world of maturity.⁸⁰

Experience here is what makes us fully human. Indeed Miriam and Donatello become heroic figures (2002, 298). Knowledge, however dearly bought, may ultimately have sublime value.⁸¹ One playful version of Miriam's encounter with the figure in the catacombs has her sell her soul for the secret of Roman fresco painting (2002, 28). Miriam characterizes peeping into the chasm precisely as a moment of insight. Kenyon later recognizes that Donatello has been transformed by his experiences, that he has encountered "those dark caverns, into which all men must descend if they would know anything beneath the surface and illusive pleasures of existence." Art and crime do not seem far apart in Hawthorne.⁸²

⁷⁷ "Was the price too great?" wonders Miriam (2002, 305). Elsewhere though the pleasures of childish life are dwelt on, e.g. 186.

⁷⁸ Hilda is horrified by this idea. But Miriam too asks: "Was it a means of education?" (337).

⁷⁹ "The story of the Fall of Man, is it not repeated in the Romance of Monte Beni?" asks Miriam (337).

⁸⁰ Donatello's old servant Tomaso describes Rome as "that wicked and miserable city" (185). Donatello insists, "I hate Rome" (206).

⁸¹ See Budick 2004, 239. How far are guilt and experience to be identified? This question is raised in the opening scene in the Capitoline museum. Should innocence be seen in opposition to guilt, or in opposition to experience?

⁸² Cf. 2002, 125, 204. See Manning (in Hawthorne 2002, xxxi). Yet despair and loss also undermine the characters' relations to art. Following the death of the model, Miriam can no longer paint, while Hilda loses her taste for Old Masters (2002, 262–3). Kenyon, too, has lost his love of art but this is a response to the temporary disappearance of his beloved Hilda, 332.

The contrast between the Old World of Rome and the New World of America is an implicit presence throughout the novel. In the preface, the New World is (rather facetiously) described as a place found by the author to be inimical to Romance:

Italy, as the site of his Romance, was chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon, as they are, and must needs be, in America. No author without a trial can conceive of the difficulty of writing a Romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a common-place prosperity, in broad and simple daylight as is happily the case with my dear native land . . . Romance and poetry, like ivy, lichens, and wall-flowers, need Ruin to make them grow. (2002, 4)⁸³

America in the narrative, especially as recollected by Kenyon, is the land of prosperity and domestic comfort;⁸⁴ it also has Edenic qualities.⁸⁵ But the innocence of America is not conducive to art (this was an idea to be developed further in Henry James's *Roderick Hudson* of 1875, whose protagonist leaves America for life as an artist in Rome). The contrast Hawthorne presents is in some ways disingenuous. His own previous work, set in America, if in earlier times, such as *The Scarlet Letter*, certainly explores wrongs, which might qualify as picturesque and gloomy.⁸⁶ A significant reason for Hawthorne's disinclination to return to America was the increasingly fraught debate over slavery in the years leading up to the Civil War. Horrified by the prospect of civil conflict, he himself had supported the policies of appeasement, a stance which progressively antagonized New England advocates of abolition.⁸⁷

⁸³ Tuscany is picturesque but lacks domestic comforts (231–2, 236).

⁸⁴ Contrast lack of concern with comfort and domesticity in Rome (2002, 32, 292). These features are insistently remarked on in the *French and Italian Notebooks*.

⁸⁵ See, for instance, the reference to the American sky, 2002, 207; to American peaches and cider, 214.

⁸⁶ Numerous parallels between Rome and America were explored by other writers: Vance 1989; Malamud 2009.

⁸⁷ Hawthorne was closely associated with Franklin Pierce (president 1853–7), a Democrat Northerner with Southern sympathies. Hawthorne's biography of Pierce (1852/3) disclosed less than liberal views on race and slavery, describing the latter as "one of those evils which divine Providence does not leave to be remedied by human contrivances, but which in its own good time, by some means impossible to be anticipated, but of the simplest and easiest operation, when all its uses have been fulfilled, it causes to vanish like a dream" (1994, 416–17). Yellin 2001 analyzes Hawthorne's contradictory view of African Americans and his resistance to engaging with the issue of chattel slavery in his own time.

If some nineteenth-century visitors insistently associated ancient Roman error with its rejection of Christianity, for other critics the institution of slavery has been the Romans' great moral error, as Margaret Malamud emphasizes in this volume.⁸⁸ Ancient slavery is never mentioned in *The Marble Faun*—even if Miriam is compared to a captive queen in a triumphal procession.⁸⁹ We might draw a contrast here with works by other novelists; William Ware's *Zenobia Queen of Palmyra: a tale of the Roman empire in the days of Aurelian* (1838) attacked the slavery and the licentiousness of Rome, insisting more generally that slavery destroys the virtue of the slaveholders as well as of the slaves.⁹⁰ Abraham Lincoln's biographer, William Dean Howells, in Rome in 1864 but resistant to its charms, observed that antique Roman portrait busts bore a close resemblance to modern American politicians, particularly those from the South.⁹¹ Debates about slavery in nineteenth-century America make frequent reference to ancient Roman parallels, as Margaret Malamud has recently emphasized.

At the same time, *The Marble Faun's* concern with race is notable. Donatello, before the death of the model, is disconcertingly compared to a dog or a child in terms which have something in common with nineteenth-century assertions of the subhuman nature of particular races.⁹² Indeed elsewhere Hawthorne's writing characterizes African Americans in disconcertingly similar terms; he doubts they are fully human. Rather they are "akin to the fauns and rustic deities of olden times."⁹³ Miriam's ethnic identity is also a preoccupation, as Hawthorne repeatedly emphasizes her Jewish appearance—though at one point it is suggested that she has some African ancestry (2002, 20). He comments as well on the distinctive features of Cleopatra: "the sculptor had not shunned to give the full Nubian lips and other characteristics of the

⁸⁸ See Malamud 2009, ch. 3, and in this volume.

⁸⁹ Yellin notes Hawthorne's disinclination to connect metaphorical and real slavery (2001, 146).

⁹⁰ The character Piso is made to observe: "Since the days of Cicero and the death of the republic what has Rome done to advance any cause, save that of slavery and licentiousness?" (quoted in Vance 1989, I 32). Ware was a Unitarian clergyman. His novel may have prompted Hosmer's *Zenobia* of 1859.

⁹¹ Vance 1989, I, 32–3.

⁹² For comparisons with dogs see above note 32. Donatello is "not precisely a man, nor yet a child, but, in a high and beautiful sense, an animal" (61).

⁹³ Quoted in Yallin 2001, 151–2.

Egyptian physiognomy" (2002, 98). *The Marble Faun* then perhaps does betray Hawthorne's subconscious preoccupation with this most fraught of American debates.

The Marble Faun is a profoundly ambiguous work, whose tone is often hard to determine.⁹⁴ Despite his concern with weighty issues, Hawthorne seems to shy away from presenting the experience of Rome as fundamentally transformative for American visitors. Hilda and Kenyon, the two New Englanders, are to some degree changed as artists by their experience of Rome's artistic wealth. Hawthorne seems uncertain as to how far this might be bad (Hilda, as we saw, loses all originality) or good. Certainly they experience temptation.⁹⁵ Hilda is drawn to the cult of the virgin and even goes to confession, though she does not acknowledge priests' power to absolve and eventually reasserts her puritan credentials (2002, 273, 276–7, 285).⁹⁶ Kenyon speaks of the attraction of the abyss—but it seems to cost him little to resist the impulse to jump. They are ultimately not much changed in their moral aspect by their time in Rome.⁹⁷

Hawthorne's emphasis on Romance perhaps suggests that Roman error need not, in the end, be seen as a real threat—at least by the Protestant visitor who is equipped to resist its pull, to focus rather on the comforting differences between American Protestant modernity and the sordid, superstitious, if sometimes beguiling, world of Rome. Any visit to Rome involved some danger, of course—at least of a physical kind. Visitors continued to dread malaria, thought to be borne by the fetid air of the Roman Campagna. It is this danger against which chapter 8's description of the Borghese gardens offers a warning: "If you come hither in summer, and stray through these glades in the golden sunset, Fever walks arm in arm with you, and Death awaits at the end of the dim vista" (2002, 58).⁹⁸ Hawthorne's daughter Una contracted

⁹⁴ Tony Tanner (James 1980, xii) describes *The Marble Faun* as Hawthorne's "most ambiguous book."

⁹⁵ Manning introduction to Hawthorne 2002: xxvii.

⁹⁶ This experience does change Hilda, "so softened out of the chillness of her virgin pride" (2002, 287).

⁹⁷ As Tanner observes of Hawthorne's characters in his introduction to Henry James's *Roderick Hudson*: "they remain impermeable to Europe and to a full sense of the darker depths of human experience" (James 1980, xv).

⁹⁸ Very similar comments are to be found in the notebooks, written before Hawthorne's family was directly affected (1980, 148).

malaria in Rome and was for some time gravely ill. Rome's dangers were in some ways all too real.⁹⁹ But for many of Hawthorne's readers, we may surmise, Roman error—whether in the form of pagan cruelty and bloodshed or of Catholic superstition and corruption—offered not a serious temptation but rather a comforting sense of moral superiority. The only Roman error they might truly succumb to was a strictly temporary one, the pleasurable sense of losing oneself in the labyrinthine streets of the old city.

There is indeed a significant tension between what one might term the “strong” sense of Roman error (relating to religion, to violent crime) and a weaker, more pleasurable notion of Roman error, relating rather to fantasy, to the free play of the imagination, as well as to the experience of wandering through the city. Hawthorne repeatedly steps back from his story, underlining its fictive properties. It is insistently described as a Romance, a genre permitting imaginative liberties; the weight of Rome highlights the flimsiness of Hawthorne's characters.¹⁰⁰ In reporting the speculation about Miriam's origins, or about what happened in the catacombs among the community of foreigners in Rome, Hawthorne underlines the unreliability of stories; Miriam herself, he suggests, playfully circulated variant versions (2002, 27, 28). Hawthorne's narrative is self-consciously fragmentary, mirroring the fragmentary remains of the Roman past; pieces are missing.¹⁰¹ Indeed the story has an indeterminacy many readers have found frustrating.¹⁰² And while Hawthorne seems to draw a sharp distinction between the weighty personages of Roman antiquity and the more insubstantial figures peopling his own tale, we may wonder whether his playfulness, his emphasis on multiple versions, does not in the end problematize also those other, apparently more reliable, narratives which aspire to the authority of history.

Nevertheless the themes explored in *The Marble Faun* are serious ones: the oppressive weight of history; the nature of guilt, of religious

⁹⁹ For a discussion of Henry James's exploration in *Daisy Miller* (1878) of parallels between Roman fever and the moral dangers threatening the unwary visitor, see Rowe in this volume.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. 2002, 124, quoted above.

¹⁰¹ Cf. 2002, 72. Elsewhere he also experimented with fragmentary form.

¹⁰² Though this aspect is celebrated in a review in *The Times* (1860), reprinted in Crowley 1970. For a perceptive discussion of Henry James's very different approach to the challenge of setting his own narrative in the context of Rome, see Lyon 1999.

doubt, of aesthetic value; the origins of creativity; and perhaps most importantly, the compelling appeal of the abyss. The long and complex past of Rome makes it an especially apt place to engage with these problems and in particular for the artist to gain those insights, which may only come from contemplating the depths. Only those who confront the dark side of Rome, the novel suggests, the dark side of the human heart, indeed, can attain true creativity, maturity, and insight. Roman error, dangerous but inspiring, remains a potent force.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ I am very grateful to audiences both at the Roman Error conference (September 2013) and at the Birkbeck Forum for Nineteenth-Century Studies panel on *The Marble Faun* (March 2015), as well as to Kate Nichols from whom I have learned a great deal about nineteenth-century views on sculpture. The volume editor Basil Dufallo made numerous helpful suggestions for improvement. A more long-standing debt is owed to Duncan Kennedy, whose insights into *The Marble Faun*, shared in an undergraduate course we taught together years ago, did much to stimulate my own interest in the novel.

7

“Im Sinne der Antike”

Masochism as Roman Error in *Venus in Furs*

Marco Formisano

Le texte-sous le nom de Masoch est à la merci intégrale
d'un texte-sur ce nom. Toute lecture est alors illisible,
du texte même. Le texte de ce nom, au nom de ce texte
est devenu le texte sur ce nom. D'où puisque le nom est
un texte, on visera un texte sans nom.

Pascal Quignard, *L'être du balbutiement.*
Essai sur Sacher-Masoch

The text at the center of this chapter has had a peculiar destiny: despite its highly fictional nature it has been received as a handbook of masochism, i.e. that particular sexual orientation or erotic activity deriving its name directly from the name of its author, Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (1836–95). In the epigraph to this chapter, Pascal Quignard presents this situation as a logical short circuit and a paradox. In fact, to the story narrated in *Venus im Pelz* (1870) was ascribed fairly quickly the label of “sexual perversion,” so as to make it comparable to the Marquis de Sade’s *Cent Vingt Journées de Sodome* in relation to the concept of “sadism.” Psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing in a later edition of his famous study *Psychopathia sexualis* (1886) coined the term masochism in order to designate the “sexual perversion” of a male individual who takes pleasure in being subjugated to a dominant woman. It is worth emphasizing that for Krafft-Ebing the “perversion” is per se gendered, since it consists precisely in the reversal of the normative female and male roles,

a dominating man and a submissive woman being the norm. This process of pathologization of Sacher-Masoch's fictional work, and in particular this novel, had two relevant interrelated consequences. On the one hand *Venus im Pelz* has been projected to the universe of psychological prototypes, but on the other precisely the medicalization of its content has had the effect of obliterating its fictional and aesthetic quality, with the result that the novel itself is scarcely read, especially qua text.¹ Instead, by discussing and presenting a literary work as the field of a sexual perversion Krafft-Ebing inaugurated the tendency to read *Venus im Pelz* and other novels by Sacher-Masoch as a testimony of the author's sexual inclinations and in continuity with his own life outside the text.² Interestingly enough, as Daniel Orrells observes (2015, 17), Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia sexualis* is based precisely on "true" autobiographical accounts provided by his patients, a clear indication that he read *Venus im Pelz* and other novels by Sacher-Masoch as fundamentally autobiographical texts.

Along these lines, Gilles Deleuze, author of undoubtedly the most influential study on Sacher-Masoch (*Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, 1967), pointed out that a disease normally derives its name from the doctor, who identifies a range of symptoms as relevant and then gathers and labels them for the first time under a unique specific pathology. But in the case of both Sade and Sacher-Masoch the situation is different, since they are at one and the same time patients and doctors: patients because they recognize and display their own behavior as a pathology, and doctors because their literary work takes up the function of identifying and putting symptoms together under a specific frame. For this reason, Deleuze speaks of a cooperation between the "critical," representing the literary sense, and the "clinical," i.e. the medical sense.³

We will return to Deleuze later, but at this point two aspects in particular need to be emphasized. First, as we will shortly see, *Venus*

¹ Interestingly enough Sacher-Masoch as an author of novels was almost completely ignored within the German-speaking world until the last decades of the twentieth century, but he has had a remarkable fortune in France where his work was almost immediately translated and largely read.

² See, for instance, Noyes 1997, 72, who nonetheless seems to confirm this critical attitude toward the text when only a page later he affirms: "The part of the book which describes the unconditional loss of masculine power is not only by far the bulk of the novel, it is also obviously the part Sacher-Masoch enjoyed writing most" (73).

³ Deleuze 1989, 14.

im Pelz is an ingenious and sophisticated literary fiction, one that by no means can be reduced to a sheer discussion of the sexual tendency of its protagonist. Yet even the essence of masochism as psychosexual phenomenon has a highly intellectual character: Hartmut Böhme speaks of a “Bibliothek-Effekt” (Böhme 2003, 12) and Drnovšek (2014) connects masochism with the aesthetic experience of the sublime.

Secondly, the theme of error, as it clearly emerges within the narrative frame, i.e. at the beginning and end of the novel, offers one possible key in order to describe the tensions that characterize this very ambiguous text. As Barbara Mennel in an insightful reading of the novel has argued, the literary and aesthetic dimension is not only a significant part of masochism, as for instance it was for Deleuze and other more recent interpreters, but it rather shapes masochism as such, so that we can argue that masochism is an aesthetic form itself which cannot be thought without involving its inherent fictional quality (Mennel 2007, 37–47). In particular, the fundamental aspect of masochism as aesthetic form is represented by both the vital role of fantasy and the continuous reversal of roles leading to the subversion of social norms.⁴ In a programmatic passage of his essay Deleuze well describes the dialectic that characterizes masochistic discourse:

The masochistic hero appears to be educated and fashioned by the authoritarian woman whereas basically it is he who forms her, dresses her for the part and prompts the harsh words she addresses to him. It is the victim who speaks through the mouth of his torturer, without sparing himself. Dialectic does not simply mean the free interchange of discourse, but implies transpositions and displacements of this kind, resulting in a scene being enacted simultaneously on several levels with reversals and reduplications in the allocation of roles and discourse. (Deleuze 1989, 22)

Venus im Pelz, more than any other novel by Sacher-Masoch, thematizes and puts on the stage precisely this programmatic reversal which highlights the ontological reciprocity of the protagonists and their behavior. As we will shortly see, its very narrative structure is organized as a reversal. And the concept of reversal is significant in order to detect another aspect, relevant to the topic of this volume: *error*.

⁴ On the role of fantasy within the masochistic game see Reik 1949 (with discussion at Noyes 1997, 181–7).

In what follows I would like to develop Mennel's definition of masochism as an aesthetic form, with a particular eye toward the thematization of antiquity within Sacher-Masoch's novel. In fact, although antiquity is continuously thematized, most evidently in the title but also at many places in the text, this strong presence has never received attention as such. Only *en passant* has it been pointed out by some critics that the presence of antiquity in *Venus im Pelz* represents the decor of bourgeois Central Europeans and their classical *Bildung* as a sign of social distinction. But I argue that antiquity is much more than that in this novel, and the goal of the following discussion will be to show how the perception of antiquity—a Greco-Roman antiquity which, as we will see, has a specifically Roman emphasis—plays a structural role within the narrative construction and imagery. Further, I argue that the role of Roman antiquity, as perceived by the protagonists (in particular, by the female protagonist) is tightly connected with and strongly substantiates the predominant theme of error within the situation of general reversal presented by the novel. Accordingly, Roman culture and literature represent an erroneous antiquity which runs parallel to the actual masochistic errors of the protagonist. Roman antiquity is the historical period which is openly and regularly thematized in the novel precisely because it is believed by the protagonists to be the only age in which the masochistic fantasy can take place. As John K. Noyes has noticed, "the masochist has found a strategy to remove his economy of pleasure *from the realm of history and reason*, from the places in which power works" (Noyes 1997, 73, emphasis added). In this novel (Roman) antiquity thus represents the privileged landscape of *error*, transferred to a sphere that is simultaneously ahistorical and deprived of rationality. The protagonists, Severin and Wanda, represent their sexual predilection as a *Roman* error in the context of a scenario that is destined to be marked at the end of the text as "wrong." Finally, in this paper I discuss relevant connections to the texts of Ovid and above all Apuleius. Even if, as we will see, Sacher-Masoch explicitly alludes to Ovid only once and in passing, and never to Apuleius, the narrative results precisely from a reversal of their ancient texts, in particular the *Metamorphoses* of each author. Indeed, I will argue that the concept of *reversal* is a key to understanding Sacher-Masoch's text. Seen in this way, *Venus im Pelz* fits well in the context of European *fin de siècle*, when the discourse of sex "emerged out of a long history of thinking about what it means to know about desire by

turning to ancient texts” (Orrells 2015, 8). But, without denying the centrality of classical reception for this field, Sacher-Masoch’s text has the key difference that it is precisely a novel (i.e. a fictional, and not a scholarly or scientific, text), one in which the eponymous “masochism” is more aesthetic experience than clinical classification.

Before dwelling on some passages in particular, it is necessary at least to briefly summarize the context of the composition of Sacher-Masoch’s most iconic novel. The Galician aristocratic Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (1836–95), although today his name resonates only in association with erotic scenarios, was an accomplished scholar, professor of early modern history at the University of Graz in Austria, and a highly prolific author, in particular of historical novels. *Venus im Pelz* was written as a part of a cycle of six novels called *Das Vermächtnis Kains* (“The Heritage of Cain”), which was originally meant to be a sort of critical encyclopedia of human feelings and institutions divided in six sections: love, property, money, state, war, and death. Within this cycle, which was not completed by the author, *Venus im Pelz* represented the first part, *Liebe* (“Love”): already in these titles we get a first and significant glimpse at two kinds of antiquity, the biblical (Cain) and the Roman (Venus). The structure of the novel is a tale within a tale. Significantly a dream opens the narration: an animated statue of Venus appears to the anonymous narrator and argues against the repression of women by men within Christian culture. She wears furs because, she says, it is cold in this northern region, to which she is not accustomed. Right at the beginning a fundamental contrast is staged: on the one hand, the ancient and pagan Mediterranean, the home of Venus, on the other, modern, Christian northern Europe, the home of the narrator. They then have a philosophical conversation on love and the erroneous distribution of roles between men and women within modern society. The narrator is then awakened by his servant who finds him asleep with a book by Hegel in his hands. The framing narrative continues with a visit of the narrator to the protagonist of the novel, his friend Severin von Kusiemski. After the narrator describes his dream to him, Severin reveals his pessimism about women in general, lamenting their cruelty, represented in his eyes precisely by Venus. Severin gives to his friend as a proof of women’s cruelty a manuscript containing the narration proper of his masochistic adventure: herewith the framing narrative is interrupted and will re-emerge only at the end of the novel. The opening sentences of the diary, entitled “Confessions of a supersensual man,” are highly significant and testify to the intention of the author to emphasize the

distance between past experience and the present time, in which Severin professes to have recovered from his previous masochistic past: "What follows has been compiled from my diary of that period, because it is impossible ever frankly to write of one's past, but in this way everything retains its fresh colors, the colors of the present."⁵ The masochistic past as it has been narrated within the diary, a form of writing characterized by the presumption of adherence to reality, has been interpolated by the present consideration of that past, which is now pathologized and seen as a psychic illness and moral error, as clearly emerges in the narrative frame, both at the beginning and at the end of the text. But—and this is the first significant reversal—the *true* experience of Severin is told within the fictional frame of the conversation with his friend and presented as a book. Thus, at this point, there are already two types of past in relation to two types of present: Severin's own past, narrated in a diary to which he now looks back; and the ancient Mediterranean in contrast with modern northern Europe.

Both the frame within which the masochistic experience of Severin is embedded and the opening paragraph of the diary itself underscore the tension between fictionality and reality that constitutes a fundamental aspect of this text. The implications of this textual device are significant, as we will see, for the dynamics of illness and recovery, committing and correcting an error, and also for the relevance of classical antiquity to the narration.

Within the diary Severin describes himself as a man with a stubborn proclivity to despotic women. During a vacation in a health resort in the Carpathians he meets the young widow Wanda von Dunajew, destined to become his obsession and the embodiment of his remarkable ideal. Wanda is a free spirit, rich and beautiful. She enjoys the advances of the young admirer. Fairly soon Severin discloses to her his erotic fantasies, in which he would like to be the slave of a cruel woman. Gradually Wanda learns from her admirer how to act her part and opens the way to the exciting play of approaching and rejecting Severin, who then completely falls in love with her and begs for more rigor and corporal torture. Wanda

⁵ The English translation of the novel quoted in this paper is by Fernanda Savage and is available online: <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/6852/pg6852-images.html> (for this reason I cannot refer to page numbers). The translation usually used in scholarship written in English is that of Jean McNeil (who also translated the essay by Deleuze). I prefer to use Savage's translation since McNeil translates not the original German but a French translation.

follows the instructions of her lover and together they decide to sign a contract that establishes that Severin is her slave. He has also to sign a letter of farewell, previously written by Wanda herself, that would give her the possibility to kill him by camouflaging her murder in a suicide. He must also give her his money and passport and change his name to Gregor and as such serve her. They finally decide to venture on a trip into another country where nobody knows them, so that Severin can unconcernedly be treated as slave in front of everyone. Quite predictably, the country chosen is Italy and the city Florence. Once arrived, Wanda starts to flirt with other men. Severin, now Gregor, tells her that for him it would be terrible if Wanda were to deliver him into the hands of one of her lovers. Of course Wanda understands the warning as an invitation and, while she treats her slave with growing cruelty, she looks for and eventually finds an appropriate partner, a beautiful young Greek diplomat with a dubious past. This inflames Gregor's jealousy, and he declares that the game is over; but Wanda soon regains her slave by flattering him. She convinces him to be whipped by her for the last time. Once she binds him to a column of her Florentine villa, the Greek man appears and whips Gregor with astonishing violence. Severin describes the scene in his diary as it follows:

The Greek fixed his cold tigerish look upon me and tried out the whip. His muscles swelled when he drew back his arms, and made the whip hiss through the air. I was bound like Marsyas while Apollo was getting ready to flay me. (...) "Now watch me break him in," said the Greek. He showed his teeth, and his face acquired the blood-thirsty expression, which startled me the first time I saw him. And he began to apply the lash—so mercilessly, with such frightful force that I quivered under each blow, and began to tremble all over with pain. Tears rolled down over my cheeks. In the meantime Wanda lay on the ottoman in her fur-jacket, supporting herself on her arm; she looked on with cruel curiosity, and was convulsed with laughter. The sensation of being whipped by a successful rival before the eyes of an adored woman cannot be described. I almost went mad with shame and despair. What was most humiliating was that at first I felt a certain wild, supersensual stimulation under Apollo's whip and the cruel laughter of my Venus, no matter how horrible my position was. But Apollo whipped on and on, blow after blow, until I forgot all about poetry, and finally gritted my teeth in impotent rage, and cursed my wild dreams, woman, and love.

This marks the end of the adventure of the domina Wanda and her slave Gregor. Consequently Severin turns back to his home in Galicia where he inherits the estate of his father. At this point the narration goes back to the initial conversation between the anonymous narrator and Severin,

which frames the events narrated in the diary. Severin declares himself to be healed now, since he finally understands that a woman can only be the slave or the despot of a man, hammer or anvil—but never his companion.⁶

* * *

Undoubtedly antiquity is far from being a pure decorative element in this text. Rather, it plays a major role all over the narration. To be sure, the protagonists often speak of a generic premoral pagan antiquity, and, as we will see, the narrative often blends the Greek and the Roman, but I would argue that the Roman element in this text's "antiquity" predominates in key ways. To begin with the most obvious points: the titular goddess is Venus, not Aphrodite; the protagonist's name may echo the Latin name Severus and with it the adjective *severus* ("strict, austere, harsh");⁷ he and Wanda take a trip to Italy, not Greece; references to emperors, gladiators, and figures like Messalina punctuate the novel. Perhaps more subtly, a variety of traces of Latin texts can be easily identified, as we will shortly see. A manifesto of how antiquity is perceived is, for instance, presented both at the beginning and the end of the novel. In the opening dream Venus *ipsissima* appears to the narrator wrapped in a fur. The narrator asks her why she wears the fur given the vernal climate and she answers that she is cold in the North. The coldness is of course of a symbolic nature, since the ancient deity argues against the entire moral world of the narrator:

I am beginning to believe the unbelievable and to understand the un-understandable. All of a sudden I understand the Germanic virtue of woman, and German philosophy, and I am no longer surprised that you of the North do not know how to love, haven't even an idea of what love is.

A bit later, Venus contrasts her ancient ideal with the kind of love practiced by modern, northern European people who are characterized by a sense of moral obligation:

⁶ "Nur seine Sklavin oder seine Despotin . . . nie aber seine Gefährtin"; "Hammer oder Amboß."

⁷ I owe this intriguing thought to Basil Dufallo. Klazina Staat has also suggested to me that the name Wanda might be a general reference to the Germanic background or a more specific allusion to the barbaric Vandals.

And yet a restless, always unsatisfied craving for the nudity of paganism . . . but that love, which is the highest joy, which is divine simplicity itself, is not for you moderns, you children of reflection. It works only evil in you. *As soon as you wish to be natural, you become common.* To you nature seems something hostile; you have made devils out of the smiling gods of Greece, and out of me a demon. You can only exorcise and curse me, or slay yourselves in bacchantic madness before my altar. And if ever one of you has had the courage to kiss my red mouth, he makes a barefoot pilgrimage to Rome in penitential robes and expects flowers to grow from his withered staff, while under my feet roses, violets, and myrtles spring up every hour, but their fragrance does not agree with you. Stay among your northern fogs and Christian incense; let us pagans remain under the debris, beneath the lava; do not disinter us. Pompeii was not built for you, nor our villas, our baths, our temples. You do not require gods. We are chilled in your world.

As already pointed out, the cold, rational, and modern North is contrasted with the warm, sensual and ancient South, i.e. with classical antiquity. And while, as a number of details in this passage remind us, this antiquity consists of a fantastic blend of Greece and Rome, I would draw attention to the final image of antiquity with its pagans and their gods: Pompeii on the one hand, and the villas and baths for which Rome was renowned on the other. This initial reference to ancient culture introduces a characteristic of the narration: the masochistic fantasy of Severin, in order to take place, establishes a sort of synchronic existence with an ahistorical classical antiquity which not only perfectly justifies but also activates the masochistic dynamic itself. Antiquity takes on the important role of furnishing the right moral, political, and epistemic context in order to understand and realize the "perversion" to which the protagonists aspire. But precisely the masochistic reality, which will be developed in the course of the narration, is presented at the beginning and judged at the end as erroneous.

Another element, though, nuances and adds complexity to this remarkable feature. As already pointed out, the masochistic tale contained in the diary has been first reworked with "the colors of the present," then framed by the conversation of the two male figures, Severin and his friend, the narrator. In key passages of the narrative frame, the two male characters tend to dismiss precisely the role of antiquity. During his conversation with (the statue of) Venus, the narrator uses a sarcastic and derisive tone towards both the goddess and her ancient background. At a certain point he sarcastically retorts to Venus: "Wir danken für die klassische Lektion" ("Much obliged for the classical lesson"). At the end of the novel (a passage to which we will be returning later) Severin, too,

openly dismisses ancient culture by stating that he won't believe anymore in anyone who (enigmatically enough) affirms that "these sacred apes of Benares or Plato's rooster are the image of God." Wanda, who represents the incarnation of Venus, undergoes a process of becoming Venus herself, a cruel Venus. Her declared goal is to live a life inspired by what she supposes to be the life of ancient pagans. In two relevant passages, placed, significantly, at the beginning of the relationship with Severin and at the end, Wanda reformulates the consideration presented by Venus within the initial dream scene:

The ideal which I strive to realize in my life is the serene sensuousness of the Greeks—pleasure without pain. I do not believe in the kind of love which is preached by Christianity, by the moderns, by the knights of the spirit. Yes, look at me, I am worse than a heretic, I am a pagan.

And a little bit later, after she and Severin/Gregor have fully established within the Florentine context their masochistic relationship and have already experimented with many possibilities, she presents what can be considered a miniature philosophy of the ancient way of life to which she aspires:

But whoever wants to enjoy must take life gaily in the sense of the ancient world (*im Sinne der Antike*); he dare not hesitate to enjoy at the expense of others; he must never feel pity; he must be ready to harness others to his carriage or his plough as though they were animals. He must know how to make slaves of men who feel and would enjoy as he does, and use them for his service and pleasure without remorse. It is not his affair whether they like it, or whether they go to rack and ruin. He must always remember this, that if they had him in their power, as he has them, they would act in exactly the same way, and he would have to pay for their pleasure with his sweat and blood and soul. That was the world of the ancients: pleasure and cruelty, liberty and slavery went hand in hand. People who want to live like the gods of Olympus must of necessity have slaves whom they can toss into their fish-ponds, and gladiators who will do battle, the while they banquet, and they must not mind if by chance a bit of blood bespatters them.

Evidently antiquity is considered the ideal background of a masochistic way of life, and here, too, I would observe the swerve from Greece (Olympus) to Rome—here, the archetypically decadent imperial Rome with its slaves, gladiators, and banquets, its pleasure and its cruelty. But precisely this way of life is destined to be considered an error, both in personal and historical terms within the fictional frame represented by the conversation between the two gentlemen. The whole Italian sojourn is

meant to recreate the imagery of a still-vital antiquity and Renaissance. And Florence, as has been shown in particular by Georges Didi-Huberman in his book *Ouvrir Venus* (1999), is the ideal home of Venus and of course of the rebirth of antiquity—a Greco-Roman antiquity as filtered through Rome and Italy.

Venus

The representation of Venus herself in this novel bears a number of significant characteristics that derive from the history of the reception of this goddess. Astonishingly enough, though, neither Venus nor the journey to Italy and Florence as the ideal background for the realization of the masochistic dream have been the subject of critical attention. So: why Venus and why Florence?

Elizabeth Asmis (2015) has recently highlighted the peculiarity of the appearance of Venus in one of the most strikingly original of classical Roman texts. Lucretius in *De rerum natura* reconfigures the symbolism of the goddess, especially by substituting the traditional invocation of the Muses precisely with an invocation of Venus. This poem from the first century BCE can easily be compared with *Venus im Pelz* for one reason in particular: both present and support a new way of life and launch a radical renewal within human culture which is meant to put in crisis the traditional culture and society of, respectively, late republican Rome and late nineteenth-century Europe. Venus is in both texts the bearer of the new message, since she represents, although in completely different contexts and for very different purposes, a new creative power able to destabilize traditional paradigms. In both texts she symbolizes the victory over ignorance and superstition. Sacher-Masoch's Venus seems actively to interact with her illustrious Lucretian predecessor precisely by vigorously rejecting the Christian morale of the North, which had during the Middle Ages condemned Lucretius to an insistent *damnatio memoriae*. Lucretius' Venus appears at the same time as the forebear and supporter of Epicurus and of course of the Romans (*Aeneadam genetrix*), especially because she is called to represent the victory of peace over war, represented by Mars. The Venus of Sacher-Masoch is depicted rather differently from the Lucretian one: she is the bearer of other attributes and qualities that evidently refer to the erotic and sexual power of the goddess rather than to the generative power attributed to her by the

Epicurean poet, but still both Venuses have a similar function within the two texts. In his book *Ouvrir Venus* Georges Didi-Huberman reminds us how complex and inherently contradictory is the figure of Venus through the ages, from antiquity until the eighteenth century; significantly, Didi-Huberman cites Venus in his reading of Sade's *Juliette*, whose eponymous heroine during her Italian tour visits precisely Florence, where she is impressed in particular by a painting by Titian, his famous *Venus*. Didi-Huberman, following the path opened by Aby Warburg, reminds us of the potential of violence and destruction present in every representation of the naked body of Venus, even in the seemingly most peaceful, like the one in Lucretius' poem or in Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*. Commenting upon this painting, which became a symbol of Medici's Florence and of Renaissance art, he argues that this Venus is the result of a series of dismemberments and of painful actions such as the castration of Uranus. A similar violence is to be found in the humanistic association of Socrates' dictum, "Know thyself," with the Flaying of Marsyas: "Pas de beauté céleste sans castration du Ciel, pas de connaissance de soi sans l'horreur qu'exprime l'écorché d'Apollon" (Didi-Huberman 1999, 46).

Sacher-Masoch's Venus seems to reactivate this element of the history of the reception of the Roman goddess, which has been marginalized and forgotten, but with an important difference: Venus here is not naked, but dressed with a fur, an element that along with her seductiveness emphasizes her bestiality.⁸ In fact, Venus' role in the novel is overtly connected to this destructive function and her figure is unmistakably associated with error: more precisely, with the "error" that, as we have already seen, characterizes masochism within the narrative tension established between the frame and story proper contained in the diary. Associated with this aesthetic and literary dimension of what we can now call the masochistic error is the failure of the role ascribed to (Roman) antiquity as the ideal background for it. In fact, the voyage of the obsessive protagonists to Florence is by no means only a spatial displacement, but also, more importantly, an *anachronic* voyage to antiquity itself. Antiquity in Warburgian terms (Warburg 1999) corresponds to its ever-present *Nachleben*, here identified with one of the most

⁸ Wanda in key moments is called a "she-bear" and a "lioness."

recognizable homes of Venus, the city of the Medici and Lucrezia Borgia, also named in the novel.

Pygmalion

In book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Pygmalion falls in love with a statue of ivory produced by himself in order to escape the repellent actions of some other “real” women through an act of substitution. I would argue that Severin implicitly casts himself as a new Pygmalion. First, he shares some similarity with the famous Ovidian figure. Above all, both are horrified by women and openly mistrust femininity:

Pygmalion had seen these women spending their lives in shame, and, disgusted with the faults which in such full measure nature had given the female mind, he lived unmarried and long without a partner of his couch. (*Met.* 10.243–6)⁹

Severin has an equally distorted relationship to women. In the first part of the novel before he gives his manuscript to his friend, he mistreats a young woman for a trivial reason and then, reacting to the reprobation of his interlocutor, he sketches out his universal theory on the only possible relationship between man and woman:

“Goethe's ‘you must be hammer or anvil’ is absolutely appropriate to the relation between man and woman. Didn't Lady Venus in your dream prove that to you? Woman's power lies in man's passion, and she knows how to use it, if man doesn't understand himself. He has only one choice: to be the *tyrant* over or the *slave* of woman. As soon as he gives in, his neck is under the yoke, and the lash will soon fall upon him.”

The same concept returns on the last page of the novel, again within the narrative frame, when Severin is asked by his friend to delineate the moral of the masochistic experience as depicted in the diary. The moral is: “That woman, as nature has created her and as man is at present educating her, is his enemy. She can only be his slave or his despot, but never his companion.” This dismissive attitude towards the female sex is not the only similarity between Severin and his famous Ovidian forebear. More relevantly, both have a predilection for stony women.

⁹ The translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* quoted in this paper is that of the 1999 Loeb edition by F. J. Miller, revised by G. P. Goold.

As is well known, the Ovidian Pygmalion is the first man who falls in love with a statuette made by himself:

Meanwhile, with wondrous art he successfully carves a figure out of snowy ivory, giving it a beauty more perfect than that of any woman ever born. And with his own work he falls in love. The face is that of a real maiden, whom you would think living and desirous of being moved, if modesty did not prevent. So does his art conceal his art. Pygmalion looks in admiration and is inflamed with love for this semblance of a form. Often he lifts his hands to the work to try whether it be flesh or ivory; nor does he yet confess it to be ivory. (*Met.* 10. 248–58)

In Sacher-Masoch's novel the stony nature of both Venus and her embodiment Wanda is emphasized on various occasions. In the opening dream Venus

sat in an armchair and had kindled a crackling fire, whose reflection ran in red flames over her *pale* face with its *white* eyes, and from time to time over her feet when she sought to warm them. Her head was wonderful in spite of the *dead stony* eyes; it was all I could see of her. She had wrapped her *marble-like* body in a huge fur, and rolled herself up trembling like a cat. (emphasis added)

Moreover she speaks with a "low stony voice" and touches her dreaming interlocutor "with her marble-white hand." Both stories represent the dialectic relationship between two different but interrelated factors: on the one hand, the vivification of statues, on the other, the fantastic power of the protagonists. The comparison between the ancient and the modern Pygmalions bears productive symbolic implications which deserve to be developed, but they also show interesting differences. The relationship of the ancient personage to his ivory statuette clearly represents an illustrious predecessor of Severin, and yet the aesthetic and psychic constellation of both texts is differently marked. Art historian Victor Stoichita discusses the difference between the Pygmalion myth as narrated by Ovid and by other ancient authors. According to other versions, in fact, Pygmalion does not produce the statue himself and, most relevantly for us, it represents Venus. Stoichita comments on these significant differences:

The changes Ovid brought to the early myth went some way toward defusing its original charge, and resulted in a significant shift. Pygmalion was no longer a king, and the statue did not represent Venus. Or, more precisely, the identity of the two characters was passed over in silence. Nor does Ovid specify that Pygmalion was a professional sculptor: no other work by his hand is mentioned, and his sole sculpture, his ivory virgin, is an ad hoc creation. The purpose of the figuration of which he is the author must be situated within the context of his

celibacy (...). The Pygmalionian creation is above all a solitary and *fantastical* act. (Stoichita 2008, 8–9, emphasis added)

The statue produced by Pygmalion takes on a function of substitution: since the man is disappointed by real women, he creates a figure to substitute for them. Stoichita also highlights the function of the statue as a talisman whose purpose is to protect him from women. But precisely this function is quickly destabilized by the fact that instead of preventing Pygmalion from a relationship to women, it in fact provokes his libido. Pygmalion's art itself is responsible for this. It is so good that it surpasses itself: *ars adeo latet arte sua* ("So does his art conceal his art," 10.252).

Many of these aspects are present also in Sacher-Masoch's text, although they emerge from another perspective, above all the celibacy and the misogyny of Severin. For instance, as soon as he acknowledges the presence of the beautiful widow, he affirms:

Really the beautiful woman up there doesn't interest me very much, for I am in love with someone else, and terribly unhappy at that; far more unhappy than the Knight of Toggenburg or the Chevalier in Manon l'Escault, because the object of my adoration is of stone. In the garden, in the tiny wilderness, there is a graceful little meadow on which a couple of deer graze peacefully. On this meadow is a stone statue of Venus, the original of which, I believe, is in Florence. This Venus is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen in all my life.

Severin's love for the statue is very similar to Pygmalion's passion:

It is sufficient to say that this Venus is beautiful. I love her passionately with a morbid intensity; madly as one can only love a woman who never responds to our love with anything but an eternally uniform, eternally calm, stony smile. I literally adore her.

I often lie reading under the leafy covering of a young birch when the sun broods over the forest. Often I visit that cold, cruel mistress of mine by night and lie on my knees before her, with the face pressed against the cold pedestal on which her feet rest, and my prayers go up to her.

He is literally obsessed by the statue and starts projecting his love for it to the woman who at the end will substitute for it:

Once when I was returning from my devotions by one of the walks leading to the house, I suddenly saw a woman's figure, white as stone, under the illumination of the moon and separated from me merely by a screen of trees. It seemed as if the beautiful woman of marble had taken pity on me, become alive, and followed me.

Moreover a multiplication of Venuses takes place within the novel. In fact, after Severin refers to his love for the statue, he must acknowledge that another image, this time a painting, corresponds more closely to his ideal: "What an accident! Through a Jew, dealing in photographs I secured a picture of my ideal. It is a small reproduction of Titian's *Venus with the Mirror*. What a woman! I want to write a poem, but instead, I take the reproduction, and write on it: *Venus in Furs*." In a full moon Severin cannot stay home and feels himself magically attracted to the meadow where the beloved statue is placed. In this instant Venus manifests herself and we clearly recognize the reference to Pygmalion:

The stars quiver very faintly in the pale-blue glamour. The meadow seems smooth, like a mirror, like a covering of ice on a pond. The statue of Venus stands out august and luminous. But—what has happened? From the marble shoulders of the goddess a large dark fur flows down to her heels. I stand dumbfounded and stare at her in amazement; again an indescribable fear seizes hold of me and I take flight. I hasten my steps, and notice that I have missed the main path. As I am about to turn aside into one of the green walks I see Venus sitting before me on a stone bench, not the beautiful woman of marble, but the goddess of love herself with warm blood and throbbing pulses. She has actually come to life for me, *like the statue that began to breathe for her creator*. Indeed, the *miracle* is only half completed. *Her white hair seems still to be of stone, and her white gown shimmers like moonlight, or is it satin?* From her shoulders the dark fur flows. *But her lips are already reddening and her cheeks begin to take color*. Two diabolical green rays out of her eyes fall upon me, and now she laughs. Her laughter is very mysterious, very—I don't know. It cannot be described, it takes my breath away. I flee further, and after every few steps I have to pause to take breath. The mocking laughter pursues me through the dark leafy paths, across light open spaces, through the thicket where only single moonbeams can pierce. *I can no longer find my way, I wander about utterly confused*, with cold drops of perspiration on the forehead. (emphasis added)

The selected passages are only a few of the many in which the motif of the statue is presented. The entire novel can really be described as a rewriting of the Pygmalion tale as narrated by Ovid, with some significant differences. Severin is obviously fearful of the hallucinatory incarnation of the statue; he literally *errs*, while he flees from the transformation. In Sacher-Masoch the reader is confronted with a long series of reproductions of Venus/Wanda so that the simulacrum of the goddess and Venus herself turn out to be prefigurations of Wanda and her own portraits.¹⁰

¹⁰ In the Ovidian tale, as already noted, the statue does not represent Venus. The goddess will only later intervene in order to grant Pygmalion's secret wish (10.270–9). In other

In the passage already quoted, Severin receives from a Jewish merchant a photograph of Titian's Venus, who in turn is reflected in a mirror. The statue in the meadow is a copy of another one in Florence, and so on. In Ovid there is no multiplication of images: Pygmalion falls in love only with one statue. But the result is the same: in the end, we do not know whether the love for a statue substitutes that for women or the other way around.

The massive presence of statues and a language which continuously metaphorizes statues' qualities or uses statues as terms of comparison (as in the passage mentioned above and in many others) is relevant for our discussion for another reason. A white marble statue is per se a reference to antiquity, in particular within German culture, where at least since Winckelmann the highest value possible is ascribed to ancient sculptures. Sacher-Masoch dresses precisely this particularly prestigious artifact with a rather surprising garment, a fur. This is a means of desacralizing ancient statues and rendering them kitsch objects, but at the time maintaining them as revered works of art. This antiquity, i.e. the northern, Christian, rational, and modern representation of antiquity, object of veneration within European bourgeois culture, is ridiculized and destabilized precisely through that bizarre element.¹¹ As a new Pygmalion, who in Ovid is busy adorning, dressing, and undressing his creature hoping that it will become alive, Severin dresses his Venus and, with her, antiquity itself in a fur. Unlike Pygmalion, though, who after having dressed his ivory girl realizes that she is equally beautiful naked (*nec nuda minus formosa videtur*, 10.266),¹² Severin seems programmatically to avoid the nudity of Venus and Wanda: the fur becomes a must, as it has been stipulated in the contract. Sacher-Masoch rewrites the Ovidian Pygmalion by *correcting* him and making of him a paradigm of masochism. As Pygmalion falls in love with a female figure that he himself has created precisely in order to escape the female gender, so Severin, otherwise fully unconcerned about women, falls in love with a modern embodiment of (the statue of) Venus. The paradox is that at the end of his masochistic fantasy, he will be healed not by an external factor but precisely by that very fantasy.

versions of the myth, Pygmalion falls in love with the statue of Venus herself. Sacher-Masoch in his novel seems to combine both versions.

¹¹ Cf. Böhme 2003, 12–13.

¹² On the metaliterary implications of this passage see Sharrock 1991, 45.

The Donkey

Many times Severin refers to himself as a “donkey.” The passage quoted above, where he describes his encounter with the incarnation of Venus’ statue and his consequent emotional state, continues in this way:

I say to myself: *Donkey!* This word exercises a remarkable effect, like a magic formula, which sets me free and makes me master of myself. I am perfectly quiet in a moment. With considerable pleasure I repeat: *Donkey!* Now everything is perfectly clear and distinct before my eyes again. There is the fountain, there the alley of box-wood, there the house which I am slowly approaching. Yet—suddenly the appearance is here again. Behind the green screen through which the moonlight gleams so that it seems embroidered with silver, I again see the *white figure*, the *woman of stone* whom I adore, whom I fear and flee. With a couple of leaps I am within the house and catch my breath and reflect. What am I really, a little dilettante or a great big *donkey*? A sultry morning, the atmosphere is dead, heavily laden with odors, yet stimulating. Again I am sitting in my honeysuckle arbor, *reading in the Odyssey about the beautiful witch who transformed her admirers into beasts. A wonderful picture of antique love.* (emphasis added)

The reference to the *Odyssey* is revealing, in particular because it recalls the wanderings/errors of Ulysses and his encounters with dangerous women like Circe. And I would argue that another ancient text, which can be read as among other things a rewriting of the Homeric poem with its entwined themes of wandering and error and transformation, is an important model here, even though it is not named in *Venus im Pelz*. The very word “donkey” brings us to Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* or *Golden Ass*, and the general atmosphere of this passage recalls in particular the eleventh book, where the protagonist Lucius narrates his retransformation back into a man by the agency of the powerful goddess Isis. The moonlight, the fear of the protagonist, the reference to the beasts, the appearance of the goddess, and the minute description of her dress are common elements in both texts. In Apuleius’ text we read:

A sudden fear aroused me at about the first watch of the night. At that moment I beheld the full moon rising from the seawaves, and gleaming with special brightness. In my enjoyment of the hushed isolation of the shadowy night, I became aware that the supreme goddess wielded her power with exceeding majesty, that human affairs were controlled wholly by her providence, that the world of cattle and wild beasts and even things inanimate were lent vigour by the divine impulse of her light and power. (*Met.* 11.1)¹³

¹³ The translation of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* quoted in this paper is that of P. G. Walsh (Walsh 1994).

And, a little further on, he describes the appearance of the goddess:

But scarcely had I closed my eyes when suddenly from the midst of the sea a divine figure arose, revealing features worthy of veneration even by the gods. Then gradually the gleaming form (*perlucidum simulacrum*) seemed to stand before me in full figure as she shook off the sea-water. I shall try to acquaint you too with the detail of her wondrous appearance, if only the poverty of human speech grants me powers of description, or the deity herself endows me with a rich feast of eloquent utterance. (*Met.* 11.3)

Of course the relationship between the two protagonists, Lucius and Severin, to their respective goddesses, Isis and Venus, is very different. Isis is going to re-establish Lucius' humanity while the power of Severin's Venus will be precisely the opposite, to transform him into a beast, a donkey unable to speak properly:

Finally I rise and bow to her. She comes closer, and bursts out into a loud, almost childlike laughter. I stammer, as only a little dilettante or great big *donkey* can do on such an occasion. Thus our acquaintance began. The divinity asks for my name, and mentions her own. Her name is Wanda von Dunajew. And she is actually my Venus. (emphasis added)

In the very last paragraph of the novel, already quoted, Severin, while in discussion with the narrator, acknowledges that his previous masochistic experience had the effect of a curing treatment. Now he is not a donkey anymore:

At present we have only the choice of being hammer or anvil, and I was the kind of *donkey* who let a woman make a slave of him, do you understand? The moral of the tale is this: whoever allows himself to be whipped, deserves to be whipped. The blows, as you see, have agreed with me; *the roseate supersensual mist has dissolved*, and no one can ever make me believe again that these sacred apes of Benares or Plato's rooster are the image of God.

Lucius, after having received instructions from Isis and after the vision disappears, also refers to the disappearance of the nocturnal mist: "At that moment the clouds of dark night were dispersed [*atrae noctis fugato nubilo*], and a golden sun arose" (11.7). The dissolving mist has for Severin a very different meaning from the one it has for Lucius. For the Apuleian hero, it offers the natural background to the beneficent appearance of Isis, while for Severin it represents the end of his experience, seen only now as an error eventually corrected by itself, i.e. by the blows inflicted upon him by Wanda's Greek lover. The masochistic

initiation, intrinsically connected to a certain perception of antiquity, seen afterwards as erroneous, bears a meaning opposite to that which it does for Lucius, since religious initiation will dissolve his aspect as a donkey by reinstating his humanity.

Perhaps a bit surprisingly for the classicist reader, although precisely a donkey is the protagonist of a very well-known Latin text indeed, no attention has ever been directed to this intertext. Yet a comparative reading of Apuleius' *Golden Ass* and *Venus im Pelz* brings to light not only a significant number of common points but leads to one fascinating aspect in particular: Sacher-Masoch's novel can be read as a radical reversal of Apuleius'. As is characteristic of any act of reception, whether explicit or implicit, the interaction between the texts works in both directions: one text serves as a model for another text, but the latter will also shed light on aspects of the former which previously were not evident. An act of reception is always unavoidably an act of interpretation of the prior text. In this case, if we read Apuleius with Sacher-Masoch, the masochism *ante litteram* of the protagonist of *The Golden Ass* emerges. Moving in the other direction, reading Severin as a modern, perhaps more neurotic, Lucius also turns out to be a rewarding hermeneutic act, especially because of the particular relationship with Roman antiquity that I have been describing.

Even at a first glance, the Latin novel contains many of the narrative and structural elements which are so important for *Venus im Pelz*. Here I can only briefly enumerate the most evident ones. On a thematic level, the beaten Severin/Gregor recalls the beaten Lucius/ass, while the slavish attitude of Lucius towards women can be read as a prefiguration of Severin's. Before Lucius is transformed into a donkey thanks to an error, he tries to convince the slave girl Fotis to show him the secrets of her mistress Pamphile, and at that point he declares himself ready to be the slave girl's "willing slave" (3.19).¹⁴ At the end, when he embraces Isis' cult, the goddess also uses the language of slavery, sealing his status with these words: *Nam cum coeperis deae servire, tunc magis senties fructum tuae libertatis* ("Once you have begun to serve the goddess, you will then better appreciate the reward of your freedom," 11.15).

¹⁴ *in servilem modum addictum atque mancipatum teneas volentem.*

Even the emblematic fetish of Severin, fur worn by women, is prefigured by Lucius' fascination with women's hair. In 2.8 he confesses: *Vel quid ego de ceteris aio, cum semper mihi unica cura fuerit caput capillumque sedulo et puplice prius intueri et postea perfrui sitque iudicii huius apud me certa et statuta ratio* ("Of her other charms I need say nothing, for it has always been my one obsession first to examine a person's head of hair thoroughly and openly outside, and then to take pleasure in it privately indoors"). Another shared motif consists precisely of error, in both senses: mistake and wandering. The donkey Lucius is condemned to a continuous wandering in consequence of an initial error. The error will eventually be corrected by Isis, who manifests herself to Lucius in the final book of the text.

Interestingly enough, although Venus plays an important role in *The Golden Ass*, she is not the one who saves Lucius, whereas it is precisely Venus with whom Severin identifies his beloved domina Wanda. This consideration leads us to an important structural difference between the two texts. In Apuleius, Isis appears in a vision at the end, while in Sacher-Masoch Venus manifests herself to the narrator right at the beginning. Apuleius' Isis intervenes in order to correct the error, i.e. to re-establish Lucius' human status, while in Sacher-Masoch Venus is precisely the origin of the masochistic error. In both texts error and conversion are of paramount importance, but the perspective of *The Golden Ass* is radically reversed in *Venus im Pelz*: in the former the final appearance of the goddess saves the male protagonist from further errors, while in the latter the initial manifestation of the goddess has precisely the function of leading Severin into his masochistic adventure, later revealed to be an error, and to push him to think about himself as a donkey. In both cases the change of identity is caused by an error, but with a crucial difference: while in Apuleius the conversion to Isis frees Lucius but at the same time renders him a "slave" of the goddess, in Sacher-Masoch the initial "conversion" to ancient Venus makes Severin a "slave" in the masochistic sense, and only when he decides to abandon his Venus/Wanda (and with her the entire ancient scenario) his freedom is restored. The reception of Apuleius' masterpiece in *Venus im Pelz*, a large and complex question to which I will return elsewhere, turns out to be fundamental for the understanding of both works, not only on the thematic level but perhaps more importantly, structurally: *Venus im Pelz* can be read as a reversal of *The Golden Ass*.

Masochistic Fantasy and the Contract

Central to the masochistic constellation is the contract. Wanda and Severin need to sign a contract in order to realize their fantasy. As Deleuze points out,

The contract represents the ideal form of the love-relationship and its necessary precondition. A contract is drawn up between the subject and the torturess, giving a new application to the idea of the jurists of antiquity that slavery itself is based on a contract. The masochist appears to be held by real chains, but in fact he is bound by his word alone. The masochistic contract implies not only the necessity of the victim's consent, but his ability to persuade, and his pedagogical and judicial efforts to train his torturer. (Deleuze 1989, 75)

Therefore the contract represents at its best the paradoxical quality of masochistic thinking, which turns out to be based solely on the fantasy of the parties involved. As Noyes puts it, "Fantasy is the key subjective element needed in order to transform social violence into masochistic pleasure" (Noyes 1997, 183). Within the novel this aspect soon becomes clear when Wanda and Severin wonder where to go in order to establish their relationship as domina and slave. Severin suggests going to an Oriental land, such as Turkey, where slavery is still legally practiced. But as soon he proposes Constantinople, Wanda replies expressing her disagreement for a particular reason:

No. I have thought things over. What special value would there be in owning a slave where everyone owns slaves. What I want is to *have a slave, I alone*, here in our civilized sober, Philistine world, and a slave who submits helplessly to my power solely on account of my beauty and personality, not because of law, of property rights, or compulsions. This attracts me. But at any rate we will go to a country where we are not known and where you can appear before the world as my servant without embarrassment. Perhaps to Italy, to Rome or Naples.

Significantly, Wanda avoids the place where the paradoxical contract established could be enforced by the local law and instead she prefers another European country where slavery is equally forbidden because she wants the contract to be based not on law, but on fantasy. Again Noyes: "The fictional nature of the legal subject becomes all too clear in the masochistic contract" (Noyes 1997, 201). The absurdity of this procedure reveals according to Deleuze the absurdity of the law:

The masochist regards the law as a punitive process and therefore begins by having the punishment inflicted upon himself; once he has undergone the

punishment, he feels that he is allowed or indeed commanded to experience the pleasure that the law was supposed to forbid. The essence of masochistic humor lies in this, that the very law which forbids the satisfaction of a desire under threat of subsequent punishment is converted into one which demands the punishment first and then orders that the satisfaction of the desire should necessarily follow upon the punishment. (Deleuze 1989, 88–9)

Deleuze goes on emphasizing the differences between Sade and Sacher-Masoch in the perception of law and institutions, and places the masochistic contract within a precise legal and psychological constellation. I prefer instead to highlight the contract as a textual device able to represent the short circuit of the masochistic aesthetic, within which antiquity plays a major role. The contract is placed at the very heart of the diary, which is supposed to represent the reality of the masochistic adventure. This real core, as we have already seen, finds itself within a fictional frame, which enters into a conflict with and destabilizes the narration proper. As Julia Emberley points out, the narrative frame also indicates a tension between the two parts of the text by emphasizing the gender of the two male interlocutors:

Masoch's feminized version of the master/slave dialectic begins with a dialogue between two men, Severin and the anonymous narrator. It is the anonymous narrator who brings Severin's manuscript *Confessions of a supersensualist* into the body of the text as its primary reader; thus, the "constructedness" of the narrative is foregrounded by the initial dialogue between the two men in a cozy living room, which introduces the actual story, the manuscript, which contains Severin's autobiographical account of his adventures in the libidinal jungle of sociosexual relations. Whereas the story itself dramatically destabilizes the regulatory expectations of heterosexuality, sexual inequalities, and an essentialist ideology of gender/sex symmetries—masculine and feminine genders symmetrically mapped onto biologically constructed male and female bodies—the textual frame in which this story unfolds provides a controlling mechanism, as if the words that pass between men could approximate by will or convention a secure site of selfsame interests and identical ideological persuasions. The formal design of *Venus in furs*, in which Severin's manuscript is framed by a homosocial dialogue between himself and the friend, institutes an apparatus of normalization which contains and, finally, rejects the discourse of sexuality constituted by the *Confessions*. (Emberley 1997, 82–3)

Thus, the form of the text itself, as it has been constructed by its author, is similar to the contract contained in it: the fictional frame describing the dream of the narrator and the conversation of the two men on the hand, and the narration proper of the masochistic adventure cooperate in order

to highlight the epistemological short circuit of masochism itself, rejected and seen as an error by Severin. Barbara Mennel rightly insists on masquerade as an essential element in order to understand masochistic aesthetics and highlights the integral role of fantasy (2007, 7 and 18). As she puts it, “whether the masochistic fantasy exceeds its many closures and conclusions, or whether the closing morals and violent endings outweigh the pleasure of the masochistic fantasy, masochistic aesthetics relies on the interdependence of the two co-existent narrative strands” (2007, 67).

The discourse of Greco-Roman antiquity, as I have described it above, significantly is present exclusively within the diary, and within it characterizes, in particular, the female protagonist, Venus/Wanda, who is overtly rejected within the framing discussion between the two men. When Severin narrates the very end of his adventure in the passage quoted above, he describes his suffering under the whip of “Apollo,” who “blow after blow” makes him forget about the pleasure previously felt as a victim of Venus, and above all, “about poetry” so that he cursed his “wild dreams (*wohllüstige Phantasie*), woman, and love.” The violent dissolution of masochism indicates the dissolution of fantasy in favor of reality, fantasy being characterized by and framed within the antique world. Apollo’s cruel blows dramatically rip Severin from the masochistic experience of the diary by projecting him into the present time of the conversation with his friend, but it is precisely this shift from the masochistic *reality* represented under the antique patina to the *fictional* narrative frame which constitutes together with the contract the proof of an epistemological short circuit.

The epigraph by Pascal Quignard quoted at the opening of this chapter, through its emphasis on paradox, makes verbally visible the intricate and circular logic of the masochistic aesthetic—in which, I am suggesting, Roman antiquity plays an essential role. The masochistic adventure, both as sexual experience and as aesthetic dimension, needs an “erroneous” antiquity in order to establish itself. The antiquity represented in *Venus im Pelz* is largely ahistorical and generic, but ultimately more Roman than Greek. Particularly well suited for a representation of the ancient world as erroneous is Sader-Masoch’s reception and reversal of Ovid’s Pygmalion and Apuleius’ Lucius, male protagonists who encounter powerful female figures. Even though they are not explicitly mentioned, not

just the Apuleian ass but *The Golden Ass* itself acquires an emblematic status in *Venus im Pelz*, precisely because it shares with the modern novel among many other themes the crucial idea of the transformation of identity, which is marked in Sacher-Masoch by the abandonment of an erroneous Roman antiquity.¹⁵

¹⁵ My warmest thanks to Virginia Burrus, Basil Dufallo, and Craig Williams for their generous comments.

8

Correcting Rome with Rome

Victor Hugo's *Quatrevingt-treize*

Michèle Lowrie and Barbara Vinken

The Romans did not invent political discord—far from it—but the tumultuous years from the Gracchi to Augustus left an imprint on the Western tradition that made the name of Rome paradigmatic not only for later conceptions of republic and empire, but also for civil war.¹ In addition to a rich vocabulary for various kinds of internal disturbance, such as sedition, tumult, and the trio of social, servile, and civil war, the Roman inheritance consists of a plethora of tropes for conceptualizing internal disturbance. Fratricide, for instance, is a conventional figuration that takes the violence of citizen-on-citizen into the family. But, in a further twist, suicide brings it within the self. The beginning of Lucan's epic on civil war joins the two: family and self are both objects of internal violence:

populumque potentem
in sua uictrici conuersum uiscera dextra
cognatasque acies

Lucan, *De bello civili* 1.2–4²

And a people turned onto its own guts with victorious hand and battle lines of blood relatives.

These tropes then become available to the subsequent literary tradition as shorthand for civil war. Fundamental questions established by Latin

¹ David Armitage's 2017 book on civil war underscores the Romans' invention of *bellum civile* as a concept.

² All translations of Latin and French are by the authors.

literature are whether civil war can be put to an end, whether it can be redeemed as the lamentable path to a brighter future, or whether it is the condition of the political as such. Civil war offers extreme conditions for examining the collapse of the social bond and for bringing conflict within the self. Roman figurations allow for different conceptualizations of this horrific collapse. Although there is agreement that civil war as such was a condition to be lamented, there was no agreement in antiquity about its meaning or about whether the refoundation it (sometimes) enabled was an end that justified civil war as means.³

If Vergil presents refoundation as possible in the wake of civil war on the condition that clemency put an end to vengeance and promises empire without end,⁴ Lucan generalizes civil war as the origin and condition of imperial politics and can imagine no future republic or empire that would offer a way out (Ahl 1976). Augustine's description of Roman history sweeps all politics within the *civitas terrena* into the same corrupt bin: the *civitas Dei*, a republic of charity on a pilgrimage in this world, is the only answer to the *civitas terrena*, but life on earth will be a *civitas permixta* until the end of history.⁵ The full realization of the *civitas Dei* remains to come. Each of these answers is formative for the tradition. Victor Hugo's *Quatrevingt-treize* not only cites them all—he sets them in dialectical conflict with one another.⁶

Although the novel has often been read as a justification of civil war as the horrific price of a new and better future (Brombert 1984),⁷ our interpretation suggests rather that Hugo retains Roman terms from both the classical and Christian sides of this tradition. These interact in such a way that each corrects the insufficiencies of the other. None is embraced fully in itself. While civil war may be Rome's terrible political legacy, one to be overcome through a politics that secularizes Christian charity, the institution of literature—for which Vergil's paradigmatic status is an Augustinian inheritance—offers Hugo a potent vehicle for

³ Ahl 1984, 42–9; Henderson 1998; Breed, Damon, and Rossi 2010.

⁴ For difficulties with this standard interpretation and further bibliography, see Lowrie 2013, which suggests that Vergil sees civil war and refoundation as operating within a pattern of cyclical violence that has hitherto failed to achieve closure.

⁵ Ratzinger 1961 has stressed this mixed state of affairs.

⁶ To that extent he surpasses the dynamic reappropriations of Vergil within antiquity as analyzed by, e.g., Hardie 1993.

⁷ For a related analysis of Michelet see Vinken 2007.

an alternative to the political sphere, which remains mired in civil war. Hugo thus suggests that the embrace of Roman error is not a cultural gesture that can be comfortably left to stand on its own, but presses upon us the responsibility to ask whether aspects of Roman antiquity rectify and redeem the erroneous aspects. Could such a dialectical reception of Roman antiquity in fact be a “better” way—even the “right” way—to practice reception?

Writing after the violent suppression of the Commune in 1871, Hugo looks back to the counterrevolutionary upheaval of 1793 that took place in the Vendée and Brittany in opposition to the new republic founded in the wake of 1789 (Mehlman 1977, 46). This upheaval he consistently calls civil war. Against the background of the Terror in Paris, Hugo sets up a symbolic conflict between characters that stand for different moral and ideological commitments. Lantenac is an aged but vigorous aristocrat who represents the monarchy grounded in the divine right of kings; as the leader of the counterrevolution, he comes from exile in England and is on the verge of ushering British troops into France; he is the great-uncle of Gauvain. Cimourdain is a middle-aged former Catholic priest, who remains celibate despite having left the church; he has transferred his ideological fervor to the republic and is committed to the strict application of republican ideals; he was Gauvain’s former tutor and loves him with a maternal tenderness; Marat, Danton, and Robespierre, the leaders of the Terror, employ him to supervise Gauvain to ensure he does not offer clemency to aristocrats; he is the bitter enemy of his former employer Lantenac. Gauvain is a young and virginal aristocrat in the model of Galahad, who embodies Hugo’s Romantic ideal and represents his political voice; he has converted to republicanism under Cimourdain’s tutelage and is fighting for the revolution directly against his great-uncle Lantenac; he stands for clemency and consistently frees the vulnerable; he is both Lantenac’s legal heir—as his great-nephew, his relation to him recalls that of Octavian to Caesar—and Cimourdain’s spiritual son. Conflict between the three men brings civil war within their virtual family. The masculine order in the novel, the order of politics and of civil war, is sterile whether through celibacy, virginity, or a promiscuity lacking issue.

The conflict between these men revolves around the fate of three innocent children who figure France’s future. They and their mother, Michelle Flécharde, have been rescued and adopted by a republican

regiment. When Lantenac destroys the regiment and has their mother shot and left for dead, he takes them hostage. He is eventually holed up with his men in his ancestral tower, La Tourgue, near the town of Fougère. It is a medieval bastion whose description recapitulates all of French history. The children are trapped in the library that adjoins it in an architectural scheme that recalls the castle of Chenonceau. Lantenac and his troops escape the republican siege by a secret door and set fire to the library with the children within. Their mother, who has been nursed back to life in the meantime, arrives after a long and arduous search for them just in time to see them through the windows of the burning library. She utters a primal scream that stops Lantenac in his tracks. He turns back, re-enters the Tourgue and the library, pulls out a ladder, descends it with the children, and is promptly arrested and imprisoned in his own dungeon.

The moment of crisis has come. The novel's climax puts the three main male characters all in a structural double bind that pits their own lives and deepest values against the very institutionalization of these values.⁸ The political conflict, which has already been internalized as a family conflict, is now further internalized as a moral, psychological, or structural conflict within each character. By saving the children, Lantenac jeopardizes his own cause by putting his life at risk. His act puts Gauvain in conflict with himself: he must decide whether to save the institutionalized republic against Lantenac's counterrevolution or to adhere to its universalizing values and grant clemency to his enemy who has come to embody republican ideals. Gauvain's only way out of this impasse is to sacrifice himself: to save the enemy and himself face the republican tribunal. The values trump the institution. After much deliberation, he slips into the dungeon and lets Lantenac escape wearing his cloak. Cimourdain, who presides over the tribunal, faces the choice of sacrificing either his republican commitments to the Terror or his republican values that find their highest expression in his love for Gauvain. Cimourdain does not in the end grant clemency, but adheres to a strict interpretation of the law and condemns Gauvain to death. The

⁸ Wahnich 2002 analyzes the ambivalence of the Terror according to a structural double bind, where to preserve the institutions designed to protect the republican values of humanity meant obviating those very values in the condemnation of citizen enemies. The resulting violence was foundational (911).

law trumps the values. Over a last meal of bread and water in the dungeon, the spiritual father and son debate their visions of politics: Cimourdain stays within a legalistic conception of republicanism, while Gauvain advances a progressive view that encompasses clemency, equality between the sexes, the emancipation of labor, and an energy policy of reliance on fossil fuels that seemed forward-looking in the 1870s. The next day, at the very moment the guillotine's blade severs the head of Gauvain, Cimourdain commits suicide with a shot to the heart. Lantenac is now free to welcome English troops into France. Whether he will do so is left open.

This bare-bones summary strips Hugo's plot of the heavy-handed ideological framework that colors it along the way, but Hugo alludes to and juxtaposes paradigms that derive from Vergil, Lucan, and Christianity throughout. A few brief examples will suffice to give the allusive flavor. A chapter called "*Minos, Éaque et Rhadamante*" (2.2.1) introduces Robespierre, Danton, and Marat as the judges of Hades. The following chapter cites the *katabasis* of *Aeneid* 6: its title, "*Magna testantur voce per umbras*" ("they give witness through the shades with a great voice"), puts in the plural the Vergilian phrase introducing Theseus' reprimand of the sinners of the underworld. These are parricides and those who have committed incest and fraud, that is, they have engaged in actions that symbolize civil war as a rupture of the social bond (cf. *Aen.* 6.619). The first line of Lucan's *De bello civili*, similarly readjusted, entitles the chapter when Cimourdain learns that Lantenac and Gauvain are engaged in battle with one other (3.2.1): "*Plus quam civilia bella*" ("wars more than civil," with *bella* moved from its line-initial position in Lucan) (Campion 2004, 110). An innkeeper informs him they are fighting it out with a series of oppositions that pit young against old, great-nephew against great-uncle, royalist against patriot, whites against blues in a fight to the death (246).⁹ Cimourdain's conclusion alludes to the traditional interpretation of the epic's first line: it is more than civil war because it is war within the family. He murmurs to himself: "*Oui, c'est plus que la guerre dans la patrie, c'est la guerre dans la famille*" ("Yes, it's more than war within the fatherland, it's war within the family," 247). The Christian touches are numerous: the mother is called *dolorosa* in an evocation of

⁹ All page numbers refer to Hugo 1957.

Mary, *mater dolorosa* ("mother in mourning," 3.2.8), and her search for the children is characterized as the Stations of the Cross (365); Gauvain appears on his way to death as if in a *gloire* (490), like Christ in "glory" surrounded by the *mandorla*; the guillotine is an *arbre sinistre* (485), a "sinister tree" that figures Gauvain's execution as a secularized crucifixion (3.7.6) (Gohin 1979, 520).

Such allusions, however, are not merely decorative. They offer conflicting ideological paradigms that merge in the novel's final sentence on the combined deaths of Cimourdain and Gauvain:¹⁰ *Et ces deux âmes, sœurs tragiques, s'envolèrent ensemble, l'ombre de l'une mêlée à la lumière de l'autre* ("And these two souls, tragic sisters, flew off together, the shadow of the one mixed with the light of the other," 491). The interpretive question is the exact interrelation of these paradigms as they come to bear on these last words, because this will let us address whether civil war is redeemed as the necessary price of a better future¹¹ or whether the republic to come operates as a real possibility, but still imperfectly realized in this world. Some live—and die—to bring it about, even while civil war remains the condition of politics in lived history. This second model follows Augustine's conception of the *civitas permixta* ("mixed city"). Untangling the substantive question about where Hugo stands on civil war will also shed light on his method of using one Roman model to combat the insufficiencies of another, of correcting Rome with Rome.

An example of how Hugo receives, collapses, and combines received paradigms for a new purpose is Lantenac's crossing of the English Channel. A pair of boat scenes (1.2–3) recalls both Caesar's storm and Pompey's murder in Lucan, so that Lantenac turns into an icon of Roman civil war writ large. But the scenes also establish him as a purveyor of harsh justice and the representative of the divine right of kings, so that he moves from a classical to a medieval paradigm. Like Caesar, Lantenac embarks incognito disguised as a peasant; he engages in a dangerous crossing in bad weather, encounters destructive forces beyond the human, and emerges unscathed. Unlike Caesar's situation,

¹⁰ Zard 2009 analyzes the novel's deployment of three irreconcilable paradigms: history as progress, catastrophe, and genealogical narrative.

¹¹ Eco 2006, 278: "What do you call a ferocious, death-sowing monster that promises a better life? An oxymoron."

the danger is not a storm, but a loose cannon, a monstrous force of technology, unleashed by human error. Also unlike Caesar, Lantenac masters it with astuteness, so that he is not characterized merely as fortune's darling like Caesar, but is in control. Furthermore, Lantenac succeeds in crossing the Channel, while Caesar has to turn back. Lantenac becomes a bigger and badder Caesar in the formal points of contrast between them, but that is not enough. Hugo balances the Roman civil war references with a contrast between the law and mercy that also folds in Christian conceptualizations. The sailor whose negligence was responsible for unmooring the cannon heroically helped Lantenac tame it. Lantenac resolves the resulting dilemma by awarding him a military honor for his courage, then promptly has him executed for negligence. Strict justice is done, but at the price of mercy. Lantenac outdoes clement Caesar, but surpasses him as a figure of Roman civil war only to embody its inexorability all the more. He remains within the letter of the law, that is, within Old Testament justice viewed through a Christian lens.

The next scene intensifies the associations with Lucan and takes the paradigms one step further. Lantenac escapes the ship, which is being attacked by enemy forces, on a lifeboat with one of his sailors, who turns out to be the brother of the man Lantenac had executed with summary justice: he wants revenge. Like Pompey, Lantenac faces murder on a tiny boat by one of his men. But Lantenac again surpasses the Roman figure. Not only does he escape a dire fate, but the conversation between the lord and the commoner also allows for an exposition of the divine right of kings. The double comparison to, and surpassing of, Pompey and Caesar sweeps all of Roman civil war into the same category so that any distinction between republic and empire becomes blurred. Lantenac has been defined in these scenes as a representative of everything harsh from antiquity: Roman civil war combined with the cruel legalism of the Old Testament tars the monarchy as monstrous. Although Lantenac's argument for the divine right of kings upholds Christian institutions, he fails to live up to Christian charity. Lantenac and the monarchy along with him remain mired in preChristian politics.

This example—and there are many like it—demonstrates how Hugo deploys allusion and elements of the plot to characterize the ideologies and political configurations of various periods of history. Suffice it to say that no period of history is presented in the novel as having yet escaped from Roman civil war or the Old Testament letter of the law, no period

has lived up to the Christian promise of a better more merciful world. Most recently, the Terror on the side of the republic and the counter-revolution on the side of the monarchy have brought back civil war and inexorable justice—if you can even call it justice—so that the French Revolution has also failed in its promise of universal emancipation and a better future for all. Furthermore, no institution, whether church or state, has lived up to this promise either. The novel's ending, however, sets the stage for a potential new start, for a refoundation in the wake of civil war that will redeem it once and for all. The question is: does it?

Gauvain's outline of a progressive politics is essentially a secular, republican version of Christian charity. The dense allusions to the Passion and crucifixion leading up to his death on the guillotine—the last supper between him and Cimourdain (3.7.5), his depiction in glory like Christ (490), the comparison of the guillotine to the cross (485)—turn him into a secular Christ and his self-sacrifice into a secular crucifixion.¹² The implication of this figuration would be to put an end to the cycle of violence and retribution that is civil war and to usher in a second turning point in history. The new era would bring to fulfillment in the secular realm a politics of charity originally outlined in the New Testament. Gauvain's self-sacrifice, like that of Jesus Christ, would redeem all sins, but the particular sins Gauvain would redeem are those of civil war. According to this paradigm, Hugo's novel would play the role of the New Testament and announce the Good News to the world.

There are several complications with this figuration. The novel's last sentence (*Et ces deux âmes, sœurs tragiques, s'envolèrent ensemble, l'ombre de l'une mêlée à la lumière de l'autre*, translated above) reinscribes Rome through allusion to the last two lines of the *Aeneid*:

ast illi soluuntur frigore membra
uitaque cum gemitu fugit indignata sub umbras.

Vergil, *Aeneid* 12.951–2

But his limbs are loosened with cold and his life indignant flees with a groan down to the shades.

¹² The cross replaces the gibbet in the 1832 preface to *Le dernier jour d'un condamné*, Brooks 2008, 543. Brooks puts the novel's denouement in the context of Hugo's lifelong opposition against the death penalty.

Hugo alters and inverts Vergil in many respects. Cimourdain and Gauvain's souls combine and fly off together as sister souls that commingle light and shadow. Turnus' soul flees with a groan down to the shades. Two souls depart, not one; they fly, an indication of upward motion, while Turnus' descends; the unity of souls implies some kind of reconciliation, while Turnus' remains indignant. But the sonic evocation of *umbras* in *ombre* reinforces the shared feature of the departure of souls, killed with or without clemency, in a new foundation. Whether Hugo read the *Aeneid* as triumphant proclamation or tragic lament, a wealth of implications emerges from these final words. The allusion makes the Augustan Age a secular parallel to the Christian turning point of history so that Rome follows one of its canonical functions in nineteenth-century French literature, namely to translate Christian ideology into the secular and political realms.¹³ The empire without end promised by Jupiter in the *Aeneid* matches up in Hugo with the secularized Christian realm. The potential for a better world announced by Christianity, but so far unrealized in history, would become not a new imperial order, however, as in Vergil, but a new postrevolutionary republican order. In addition to offering a secularized New Testament, Hugo's novel would also add a new *Aeneid* to literary history. Just as the two souls are united in death, so would the classical be united with the Christian in a secular New World Order. What could be better?

Hugo, however, does not allude merely to the *Aeneid*: when Cimourdain commits suicide, Rome also returns in Lucan's classic trope for civil war (*De bello civili* 1.2–4). In the very moment when the internal destruction that characterizes Roman politics is to be left behind for good in a new foundation of a republic of charity, it is not just the tragic Rome of Vergil's *Aeneid* that rears its head, but also the grotesque Rome of Lucan's *De bello civili*. The return of the Lucanian Rome activates the *Aeneid*'s darker side: Aeneas chooses vengeance over clemency and consequently sets Rome's foundation on a course that will lead to recurrent civil war. Can this cycle ever come to an end? Augustus himself pursued vengeance when he was a *triumvir* along with Antony and Lepidus, but, Vergil suggests, he also has an opportunity to turn toward clemency, to put history on a new footing, to circumvent the traumatic

¹³ Flaubert dismantles this secularized *translatio Romae*. Paris is a new Rome, daughter of Babel, the very embodiment of the *civitas terrena*. See Vinken 2007, tr. 2015.

repetition that has hitherto plagued Rome as it has Hugo's France. By analogy, Cimourdain's suicide would tarnish if not spoil the redemptive efficacy of Gauvain's self-sacrifice¹⁴ just as Aeneas' vengeance fails to establish clemency as the foundational gesture. Clemency would have to wait until the time when Augustus brought civil war to an end, the new period of tenuous stability during which Vergil was composing his epic poem.¹⁵

French history of course bears out the failure to bring internal violence to an end in 1793. When Hugo wrote *Quatrevingt-treize*, France had just witnessed the slaughter of the Commune nearly eighty years after the events depicted in the novel; they were still waiting for the fulfillment of the revolution, a new age that would put civil war behind them. Their Augustus had not yet come, much less a new Christ—Napoleon's self-fashioning as both had not brought about a golden age of empire, much less a viable republic.¹⁶ The decades between the events of *Quatrevingt-treize* and its composition witnessed successive revolutions with successive cycles of monarchy, empire, and republican government, each unstable. It is Napoléon le Petit's coup in 1851 that Marx (1978, 594) satirizes in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* as history returning as farce. Hugo himself, after attempting to shelter the remaining Communards in Belgium, returned to self-imposed exile on Guernsey, where he wrote *Quatrevingt-treize*. His political career as a member of the Assemblée never reached such a level of success that he could become a strong enough leader to bring his political vision to fruition. But he continued to try to change the world through his writings. His extraordinary ambition to write the equivalent of scripture or of national epic may look hubristic in retrospect—but it accords with his actual status as the long-lived lion of nineteenth-century French literature. Cocteau's famous quip (1932, 28) hits both his hubris and his stature: *Victor Hugo était un fou qui se prenait pour Victor Hugo*.

Just as Vergil both prophesies lasting empire and inscribes rage into Aeneas' killing of Turnus with all its political implications, so does Hugo mix shadow with light, suicide with redemption. He recognizes the

¹⁴ Peyrache-Leborgne 1996, 64 sees the ending as a *retournement théâtralisé de la catastrophe en vision rédemptrice et anti-tragique*, but also notes that Hugo maintains in tension until close to the end the registers of tragedy and transfiguration.

¹⁵ Lowrie 2005 analyzes overlapping models of foundational violence in the *Aeneid*.

¹⁶ For Napoleon's self-fashioning in an antique mold, see Morrissey 2010.

historical continuation of civil war beyond the novel's horizon, like Lucan, at the same time as proclaiming a vision of a new world order, like Vergil. His model, however, for this double message may still be Roman, but it is no longer classical. In the preface to *Cromwell*, he offers background to one of his dramas in an extended essay that articulates his understanding of literary history as stages leading to his own Romantic poetics. Lyric, epic, and drama correspond to primitive, ancient, and modern eras, where each era contains all genres and modes, but still has a dominant modality. The decisive break between ancient and modern for him is the advent of Christianity, whose celebration of the duality of body and soul, as he sees it, opens up a poetics whose highest value is not the beautiful, as in classical antiquity, but rather the heightened conjunction of the sublime with the grotesque, the light with the shadow, that is the hallmark of Romantic aesthetics (Hugo 1963, 416). Although he credits Latin literature in its death throes with the birth of the grotesque, particularly in imperial satire and the Roman novel, the authors he locates at the transition point are Longinus on the classical side and Augustine on the Christian (Hugo 1963, 416).

The Church Father offers a way into understanding the ending of *Quatrevingt-treize* on both political theoretical and literary levels. Augustine conceives of the *civitas permixta* as the condition of earthly history, where the *civitas terrena*, imbued in the corruption of Roman politics and characterized by civil war, keeps the *civitas Dei* from full realization within history, but citizens of the *civitas Dei* obey a higher order and keep her going on her pilgrimage. This conception helps explain the shadow mixed with the light not just from an aesthetic, but also from a political, point of view: Gauvain's republic of charity, like the *civitas Dei*, must always struggle with the reality of politics as civil war. His self-sacrifice cannot be disentangled from Cimourdain's suicide, and the realization of the republic of charity remains a real possibility, but one always deferred to the future. By sacrificing himself, Gauvain has opened up the possibility for a new way, but its realization, like Christian salvation, is available though not guaranteed.

Augustine additionally helps understand why it is that Rome, despite offering a bad model, cannot simply be left behind.¹⁷ Although the

¹⁷ Marrou 1958 is the starting point of this long and ongoing discussion.

Church Father presents Roman politics as consistently traversed by civil war, Rome remains for him the condition of the world. The republic of charity in Hugo is a translation of Christian charity into the secular realm and the pervasive references to classical Rome enable the secularization. It is furthermore not simply in the political-theoretical dimension that Rome provides the governing structures. Like Augustine, Hugo's schooling was steeped in reading the Latin classics. Vergil for Augustine stands for literature as an institution, one he would reject but that he recognized nevertheless as formative. For Hugo, as for Dante, Vergil sits just before the transition to the new age. In his preface to *Cromwell*, Hugo makes him the moon reflecting the light of Homer's sun (Hugo 1963, 433), but it is precisely his position at the cusp of the new beginning that aligns him with Hugo's own perceived historical position. Vergil is the unknowing pagan prophet of an age beyond his ken. Because Christianity offered a model for the turn from classical antiquity to modernity, Hugo thinks he can see beyond the limitations of contemporary history to the new world order to come. He is its prophet and he therefore writes its scripture (Bénichou 1977).

Hugo uses a Christian framework to condemn Roman politics, so that Augustine corrects Vergil and Lucan alike, but recuperates republicanism in a Roman mode to secularize the Roman Church, which has failed to escape civil war, the curse of Roman politics. He furthermore recuperates Latin literature to take his vision beyond the political, but whereas Augustine leaves politics behind for a Christian vision, the authority of the classical authors allows Hugo to make literature the secularized realm of the spirit against Augustine. What Hugo could not foresee is the coming cultural fragmentation that would make his condemnation of Roman politics according to Roman models not only irrelevant, but unreadable. Modern Hugo scholarship catches an occasional allusion, but has become blind to the deep and systematic nature of Hugo's deployment of Roman categories. For Rome to offer even an erroneous model, it has to remain a compelling framework to resist. What stands out in Hugo's resistance is that Rome offers the very framework for resisting Rome.¹⁸

¹⁸ This article offers a preview of a book in progress entitled *Civil War and the Collapse of the Social Bond*, in which Lowrie and Vinken analyze the formative role of Roman figurations of civil war for modern literature.

9

The Roman Aura in Henry James's *Daisy Miller*: *A Study* (1878)

John Carlos Rowe

Who, then, was Cestius,
And what is he to me? – . . .
In beckoning pilgrim feet
With marble finger high
To where, by shadowy wall and history-haunted street,
Those matchless singers lie. . . .

—Thomas Hardy, “Rome: At the Pyramid of Cestius near the
Graves of Shelley and Keats (1887)” (Hardy 1976, 104–5)

Henry James's *Daisy Miller: A Study* (1878) offers an intriguing example of how nineteenth-century Anglo-American writers engaged in arguments—whether explicit or implicit—over the decline and fall of the Roman Empire and the best means of using Rome's example as a warning to their contemporaries. Thus here a fundamental “Roman error” is very much the occasion for debate over correct reception of the classical past, as the main premise of this volume would have it. With its Roman setting and frequent references to classical culture, *Daisy Miller* follows primarily the Anglo-American Romantics' contention that classical Rome failed to develop a comprehensive democracy and thus lapsed into fatal despotism. Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88) had a profound influence on these nineteenth-century views of ancient Rome, especially during the several neoclassical revivals in sculpture and architecture during the century on both sides of the Atlantic. But James's

interest in ancient Rome was motivated in large part by his sense that in the post-Civil War period America was an emerging global power. Although not overtly critical of U.S. expansionist projects, James nonetheless stresses the need for a democratic *imperium*, which would recall the mistakes of ancient Roman despots and affirm the democratic aspirations of the new American nation. To achieve this end, James suggests, previous views of Rome's relevance to central issues of class and gender are not fully adequate—and the enduring character of Daisy, for all her apparent shortcomings, allows us better to discern the development of James's thought in this regard.

In arguing thus, I depart from current views of Rome's importance in *Daisy Miller*. In many respects, James's attitudes toward ancient Roman misrule are conventional by the time he writes the novella, and are well established in the English Romantics and American transcendentalists who had a profound influence on his early work (Fogel 1981, 1–17). But in other respects, James deploys this familiar interpretation of Rome's failures in order to respond to modern social changes, especially changing views of female sexuality like those expressed by classically inspired American women artists who had come to Rome, among them Harriet Hosmer and Maria Louisa Lander, as we shall see. If James rejects the feminism of these American women, he nevertheless makes his heroine, Daisy, into a means of expressing his democratic vision through the novella's Roman settings.

Previous scholarship tells a different story: because James's early writings are so dependent on their Romantic sources, most of this work has been treated as preparatory for the realism of his middle years and the modernism of his Major Phase. Insofar as *Daisy Miller* draws on popular conventions of the "American Girl" and the "international theme," the novella has also been considered one of James's less sophisticated works. On several levels, the moral lesson of *Daisy Miller* does indeed seem obvious. A young American woman innocent of European customs and lacking proper parental supervision goes about socially and publicly with Italian men judged inappropriate for a woman of her class. When warned of her improper behavior, she openly rejects such good advice and ends up exposing herself to the dangers of nineteenth-century Rome, including malaria, or "Roman fever." Although the moral responsibility for her premature death can be shared by everyone in the novella, the moral of the story seems profoundly conventional. Young women in foreign places

ought to heed the advice of the more mature members of their class and country. As in so many other works by James, the protagonist is a mere "occasion" around which James organizes the moral "ado," in which subordinate characters reveal their ethical qualities in the ways they relate to the protagonist. The Roman settings in the novella evoke moral decay, objectified in the ruins of the Roman Empire, and thus the sentimental conclusion that Daisy's bad decisions have buried her forever in a place of ancient dissolution.

This conventional reading of *Daisy Miller*, however, turns on a crucial misunderstanding. It has stressed how the ironically named Frederick Forsyth Winterbourne fails Daisy by confusing his sexual desire for her with his obligation to the expatriate American community's social values.¹ So much has been written about Winterbourne's hypocrisy in at once judging Daisy a little American flirt and at the same time enjoying her attentions that his moral responsibility in the novella has virtually obliterated Daisy's identity. Most critical interpretations make her into the mere occasion for Winterbourne's education or miseducation, depending on how we evaluate his actions. Yet Winterbourne is far more conventional than Daisy, who judges him from the beginning as "'solemn . . . as if you were taking me to a prayer meeting or a funeral'" (*Daisy Miller* 41) and by the end to have "'no more 'give' than a ramrod'" (83).² Uneducated and unsophisticated as she is surely intended to appear, Daisy has an uncanny ability to express in newly meaningful ways the rich history that surrounds her in Switzerland and later in Rome. For all his studies in Geneva, Winterbourne rarely connects with the Europe where he has lived for so long. Daisy is also exceptionally aware of how others view her, often taking pleasure in shocking their conventional values; what many of the other characters assume is naive coquetry is often designed iconoclasm.

¹ When Winterbourne asks Daisy to introduce him to her mother, she answers: "'Oh my—I can't say all that!'" (*Daisy Miller* 31). Much has been made of his surname and its association with personal coldness, moral rigor, and even Swiss winters, but his middle name has received little comment. Besides the alliteration of "Frederick Forsyth," which makes his given names a mouthful to enunciate, "Forsyth" suggests a homophone on "for sooth" and "foresight." James suggests this young man has neither truth nor foresight.

² James is even more explicitly sexual in Daisy's reference to Winterbourne's "stiffness" in the 1878 edition: "'But I noticed you were as stiff as an umbrella the first time I saw you'" (James 1878b, 62). James continues, "'You will find I am not so stiff as several others,' said Winterbourne smiling" (62).

James associates Daisy's rebellious character with the English Romantics for whom the Swiss and Roman settings in the novella have particular significance, and in this James's special originality lies. For the English Romantics, values such as the idealization of democracy, its revolutionary spirit, its hatred of tyranny, and its fierce individualism were identified with a commitment to political and personal liberty, which included advocacy of open sexuality, often at odds with conventional mores. To be sure, James's American Girl can hardly be expected to have read a line of the great English Romantics, so her connection to them appears at once James's sly addition as the literate author and a certain affinity she shares with them primarily by way of her "character." Her associations with the Romantics are also the means of linking her much more directly to the classical sites, such as the Roman Colosseum, which she seems to visit merely as tourist destinations. Seen through a Romantic lens, Daisy's Rome is full of classical grandeur and both the promise and risks for the modern empires emulating the classical model. Yet although the Romantic allusions in *Daisy Miller* have often been noted, Daisy has rarely been associated with them, except to note her ignorance of their significance (Meyers 2007, 94–100).³ The knowledgeable reader or Winterbourne is presumed to understand James's references and their moral meanings, thereby deepening the conventional ignorance or cultural illiteracy of Daisy. Daisy, however, embodies in her character far more Romantic features than Winterbourne, even if it can be argued that through her actions she fails to develop or successfully deploy these qualities.

Let us first pursue in some detail Daisy's Romantic affiliations, before turning to their larger significance with respect to James's contemporary milieu. Daisy is explicitly identified with Byron, whose reputation as political rebel and sexual adventurer were part of his Victorian legend. James alludes to *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816) and *Manfred: A Dramatic Poem* (1817) in *Daisy Miller*, poems by Byron that suit the novella's scenes at the Castle of Chillon and the Roman Colosseum. Like Daisy, Byron dies of a fever, albeit in Missolonghi, Greece, rather than in

³ Meyers 2007 discusses briefly James's associations of Daisy with the English Romantics, but Meyers concludes that these references serve primarily to render her "apparently superficial and transparent character . . . ambiguous" (98).

Rome, and Byron and Daisy are both involved in rebellions, even if Daisy's rebellion against social mores in Rome hardly compares with Byron's support for the Greek revolution against the Ottoman Empire. Byron's Romantic protagonists in both poems are, of course, men, and the different struggles they represent seem to have little to do with a young woman's rebellion against the conventions of courtship and male-female social relations so central to James's novella. In the conventional reading of the story, then, these Byronic allusions are not only ironic when linked with Daisy but they express a certain *bathos* or mock heroic quality. Daisy is so far from Byron or his historical subject, the Genevan prelate François Bonivard in *The Prisoner of Chillon*, and his poetic hero, Manfred, as to cause the knowledgeable reader to laugh out loud. Indeed, these allusions appear to resolve the long-standing dispute among critics regarding James's attitudes toward women's rights in this novella. Daisy falls so far short of Byron, Bonivard, and Manfred as to lead the reader to conclude that James is an outright sexist, teasing us with a "rebel" whose cause trivializes the very idea of women's rights.

Winterbourne recites lines from *Manfred* while walking at night in the Colosseum, just moments before he spies the unchaperoned Daisy strolling there with Giovanelli. James does not give us the actual lines, writing instead that "as he stood there he began to murmur Byron's famous lines out of 'Manfred' . . ." (*Daisy Miller* 85). There is only one place in Byron's poem where Manfred mentions the Roman Colosseum: in his monologue opening Act III, scene iv, as he contemplates the wonder of Nature from the interior of his alpine castle's tower:⁴

I do remember me, that in my youth,
When I was wandering,—upon such a night
I stood within the Colosseum's wall,
'Midst the chief relics of almighty Rome; . . .

Byron, *Manfred*, III, iv, 8–11

Manfred himself wonders at his mental wandering, but the Romantic conventions are clear enough. The "rolling Moon" shines "upon / All this":

⁴ All quotations of Byron are from Byron 1945.

The gladiators' bloody Circus stands
 A noble wreck in ruinous perfection,
 While Caesar's chambers, and the Augustan halls,
 Grovel on earth in indistinct decay.

Byron, *Manfred*, III, iv, 27–30

The moon represents not only eternal nature but also the imagination, and it reminds Manfred of his dead lover, Astarte, who appears and is named for the first time in Act II, scene iv, at the Hall of Arimanes, recalled from the dead by the spirit Nemesis (Byron 1945, 399–401).

Astarte is the Canaanite goddess of sexuality and fertility, as well as war (Ackerman 2001, 23). Derived from the Babylonian Akkadian and Semitic Ishtar, Astarte was associated with the Evening Star, Venus, and thus considered a counterpart of the Greek Aphrodite and Roman Venus (Van der Toorn 1999, 109–10). Her association with war also gives her a strong affiliation with death. In Byron's *Manfred*, the hero's beloved, Astarte, has died in some "bloody" conflict for which Manfred feels responsible, although it was not her blood he has "shed" (Byron 1945, 395). Called forth by Nemesis with permission from the lord of the underworld, Arimanes, Astarte brings together several different pre-Christian references in addition to her own Middle Eastern lineage. Nemesis, the daughter of Night, is the Greek goddess of indignation and retribution, who "punishes *hubris*" and "guards against excess" (Roberts 2007). Arimanes is Ahriman, the Zoroastrian god of darkness and the underworld, who engages in the mythic struggle with Ahura Mazda, the god of light.

Winterbourne's identification with the hero of Byron's "metaphysical drama" seems profoundly ironic, because Winterbourne is on the verge of chastising Daisy for the impropriety of touring a classical ruin at night with an Italian male, presumed to be a fortune hunter. Byron wrote the poem during his tour of the Bernese Alps after leaving England amid the scandal involving the failure of his marriage to Annabella Millbanke, who accused Byron of having an incestuous relationship with his half-sister, Augusta Leigh. The poem has long been considered autobiographical, Manfred's unspecified sin considered a veiled confession of Byron's incestuous relationship, and the Faustian overtones in the poem hints of Byron's elaborate rationalization of his love affair as that of a man whose sexuality exceeds conventional boundaries. Manfred's refusal of the redemption offered him repeatedly by religious figures in the poem, like the Abbot, also sounds much like Byron's own anti-Christian sentiments. Byron's

hybrid pantheon of divinities in *Manfred* suggests the poet's own enlightened syncretism.⁵ As a magus, Manfred both invokes these supernatural powers and yet cannot fully control them. Manfred's embrace of death in what appears his willful suicide aligns him with metaphysical rebellion, certainly a far cry from Winterbourne's end in the novella when he returns to his "studies" in Geneva and his interests in "a very clever foreign lady" (*Daisy Miller* 94).

Manfred's mysterious sin and Byron's scandalous relationship work far better in reference to Daisy than Winterbourne. James's identification of Daisy with Manfred may be ironic, but her defiance of social and sexual mores resembles that of both Byron and his poetic protagonist. Refusing the social redemption offered by Mrs. Costello and Mrs. Walker, Daisy insists on risking death for the sake of the liberty to associate with whomever she pleases. Like Manfred, Daisy in the Colosseum does not imagine herself a religious martyr, but in fact a rebel against that very idea. Her individual liberty speaks from the old site of Christian martyrdom, where a cross had been installed to memorialize religious suffering, but her revolt is clearly secular and social.⁶ Like Byron and Manfred, Daisy makes a Faustian pact not so much with the devil but with life itself: better to die following your own principles than to live a slave to others' ideas. In this context, Giovanelli's companionship becomes a mere convenience, hardly evidence of her licentiousness, and a reminder of the American expatriates' stereotypes of Italian males as fortune hunters. Giovanelli is, after all, a *cavalieri avvocato*, or a trained lawyer in the Italian civil service. His professional status and education ought to be equivalents to most of those in the American expatriate community, even if his economic means are inferior to the Americans' fortunes.

So far the connection with the classical world in *Daisy Miller* is tenuous, sustained by brief allusions to Byron's *Manfred* and the novella's Roman setting. Tempting as it is to equate Daisy with Byron's Astarte, the

⁵ Byron famously declaimed against the Church of England in one of his speeches in the House of Lords, commenting on how the Church discriminated against people of different faiths. He himself was strongly drawn to Islam, although he was probably an atheist at heart, like his close friend, Shelley (Dallas 1824, 679).

⁶ Pope Benedict XIV (1740–58) sanctified the Colosseum and erected Stations of the Cross within it. These memorials to Christian persecution by the Romans lasted until 1874, when a large bronze cross was placed at the center of the amphitheater (Litfin 2007, 44). The actual martyrdom of Christians in the Colosseum is disputed by historians, only one documented case of martyrdom in the Colosseum existing.

ancient goddess' supernatural power seems out of proportion to little Daisy's ordinariness. But a renewed fascination with ancient goddesses was a feature of nineteenth-century women's rights. Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) offers us a long list of classical goddesses and Greek tragic heroines to make the case for women's venerable influence in politics, society, religion, and culture.⁷ Long before the popularity of "goddess worship" among second-wave feminists, nineteenth-century women's rights activists viewed positively the relative equality of feminine forces in classical religions.

James ironically connects the current events—courtship and tourism—among his expatriates in Switzerland and Rome with grander historical and cultural events. Winterbourne is no match for Byron's Manfred, and Daisy for neither Manfred nor his dead lover, Astarte. The novella's expatriates in Geneva and Rome have little in common with Percy Shelley, Mary Godwin, Lord Byron, Claire Clairmont, and Dr. John Polidori, who spent that legendary summer of 1816 in the vicinity of Geneva, producing such famous works as Shelley's "Mont Blanc," Mary Godwin Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Lord Byron's *Prisoner of Chillon*, and Polidori's "Vampyre."⁸ The late nineteenth-century Americans may follow the same path as the English Romantics took from Switzerland to Rome, but the Americans seem largely ignorant of their celebrated predecessors.

Yet these same English Romantics were followed to Italy by lesser-known Americans with strong commitments to their Romantic ideals and neoclassical styles and values. Daisy Miller has often been compared with the historical Margaret Fuller, who covered the Italian republican revolution for the *New York Tribune*, met Giovanni Ossoli, a supporter of Giuseppe Mazzini and Italian independence, and gave birth to their son during the siege of Rome in 1848 (Rowe 2003, 15). Like his father's generation, especially Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry James, Jr., satirized Margaret Fuller as a women's rights activist and global political activist

⁷ Margaret Fuller (2003) offers a wide variety of goddesses from different religions, especially in her Appendices, which include discussions of the Egyptian Isis, the Virgin Mary, the Old Norse Frigga, and classical heroines Iphigenia and Antigone as examples of how feminine figures have shaped religions and cultures throughout history (410, 411, 415, 426).

⁸ In our own era, Ivan Passer's film, *Haunted Summer* (1988), mythologizes this summer of romantic productivity and sexual abandon.

who typified all they held in contempt about "liberated" women (Rowe 1998, 38–40). Educated by her father at home and able to read Latin and Greek by the age of five, Fuller writes in prose that is Latinate in style and richly allusive to classical myths. Fuller wanted to demonstrate her competency in the learning that was typical of male education in the first half of the nineteenth century (Rowe 2003, 12).

James would refer snidely to the "Margaret-ghost" in his memories of the American expatriate group of sculptors in his biography of William Wetmore Story, son of Associate Justice Joseph Story (1811–45) of the U.S. Supreme Court. By the "Margaret-ghost" he meant the liberal spirit of political reform that still influenced that community long after her death in a shipwreck off Fire Island in 1850 (WWS, I, 127). Although by no means uniformly liberal in their political views, the American artists and writers drawn to Rome and Florence in the 1840s were committed to abolition and, in qualified ways, to women's rights. They were heirs to the transcendentalist legacy and considered their comfortable circumstances in Italy a version of those utopian communities, like Brook Farm and Fruitlands, that had made the transcendentalists famous.

Following such European sculptors as Antonio Canova (1757–1822) and Bertel Thorvaldsen (1789–1839) to Florence and Rome, these American artists were committed to neoclassical ideals in art and life. One reason the Story family finally convinced a reluctant Henry James to write *William Wetmore Story and His Friends* (1903) was that James had known most members of that community in his residence in Florence and Rome from 1872–4. Their neoclassical interests were integrally tied to their conception of the United States as a new Roman Empire, but committed this time to the ideals of democratic equality. Horatio Greenough's *George Washington* (1841) represented the general and first president as a Roman emperor, dressed in a toga, raising his right hand to point to divine justice and extending the sheathed sword of peace in his left. Criticized as Greenough was for imagining Washington as a pagan tyrant, the sculpture had nonetheless been commissioned by the U.S. Congress to celebrate the centennial of Washington's birth. Hiram Powers's *The Greek Slave* (1843) used classical sculptural ideals of feminine beauty to indict not only Greek despotism but also the international slave trade. Widely viewed as an allegory of abolition as well as Greek nationalism, *The Greek Slave* was draped to cover its exquisite nudity in the Boston Athenaeum and exemplified a daring new advocacy

of the divinity of the human body that drew upon classical sculpture's naked human forms. The bare breasts of Story's brooding *Libyan Sibyl* (1861) and the elegant drapery of Harriet Hosmer's *Zenobia in Chains* (1859) invoke a classical tradition of representing human bodies in eternal, divine forms. The erotics of sculptures like Benjamin Paul Akers's *The Dead Pearl Diver* (1859) and Harriet Hosmer's *Beatrice Cenci* (1856) were justified by their classical poses (Rowe 2002, 87–96).

The American women sculptors who joined the expatriate community in Rome are particularly notable, because they include some of the most important women artists of the nineteenth century. Harriet Hosmer (1830–1908) had a long, successful career, which included commissions for major public sculptures around the world. By no means a women's rights activist, Hosmer nonetheless was supportive of other women artists, especially in the expatriate community of Rome. In *William Wetmore Story and His Friends*, James refers dismissively to the “white marmorean flock” of women sculptors, and his sexist remark probably captures well some of the patronizing attitudes Story and his circle felt toward these women (*William Wetmore Story and His Friends*, I, 257). One woman sculptor in particular, Maria Louisa Lander (1826–1923), was specifically censured by the social circle informally run by William Wetmore Story. Rumored to be living out of wedlock with an Italian man and to have posed nude as a model for other artists, Lander was invited to Story's house and subjected to an intervention. At the end of the discussion with other Americans, Story suggested that Lander present herself to the U.S. consul in Rome and apologize for her conduct. Lander refused and persisted in her defiance for as long as she remained in Italy (Herbert 1993, 231).

Lander's sculptures as well as her lifestyle had been daring, albeit not as scandalous as Byron's amorous affairs. Her most famous sculpture is the monumental figure of *Virginia Dare* (1859), today visible on Manteo Island, North Carolina, to memorialize the first English child born in the Americas. Highly stylized, bare-breasted, clothed from the waist down in a skirt adapted from Pamunkey dress, the adult Virginia Dare stares into the middle distance, proud of her identity and gender. Neoclassical in style, the sculpture combines conventions of the “noble savage” with Lander's interpretation of Dare's Enlightenment bearing and gaze. Perhaps equally famous for the scandal surrounding it is Lander's *Bust of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (1858), completed during the Hawthornes'

residency in Italy and showing the author in the manner of classical sculptures of political and cultural leaders, staring off into the middle distance in a manner matching Virginia Dare's gaze. The bust is somewhat unusual for the relatively long extension of the upper chest to just above the nipples, revealing the curve of the pectoral muscles. The "nudity" of Hawthorne's upper chest posed a problem for Hawthorne and his wife, Sophia, who upon viewing the finished sculpture were shocked by its "exposure." Having commissioned the bust, they paid for it but refused to take delivery of it, perhaps responding to the perceived pressure from the expatriate community that had so recently censured Lander (Gale 1991, 272–3).

These historical threads suggest an intriguing pattern in James's *Daisy Miller*, especially if we read Daisy as more than simply the "occasion" around which the "ado" of the other characters represent themselves but as a complex figure in her own right. Byron's Manfred, his spiritual lover Astarte, Margaret Fuller whose "Margaret-ghost" still haunts, the "white marmorean flock" of women neoclassical sculptors in Rome, the "scandal" of Louisa Lander's lifestyle and artistic works all suggest James's profound anxiety about women's rights activism and its multiple connotations for the future of American society and culture. Tracking down these allusions may appear to tell the same dreary story: like William Wetmore Story, James was terrified by liberated women and exaggerated out of all bounds the consequences of their activism. Like his most influential precursor, Hawthorne, about whom James would publish a critical study in the English Men of Letters series one year after the publication of *Daisy Miller*, James responded to women's rights activists with exaggerated dread and foreboding.

Yet there is another interpretation that by no means diminishes James's conservative reaction to women's rights, but which may have larger macropolitical significance. In the decade after *Daisy Miller*, James would publish *The Bostonians* (1885–6) and *The Aspern Papers* (1888), both of which make strong cases for the failure of such progressive women as Olive Chancellor and Verena Tarrant and such dependent women as Juliana and Tina Bordereau, who live in the shadow of a great male poet. In all of these works, James judges his feminine characters' rebellions as inadequate, insufficiently radical, hardly comparable to the Byronic daring of Manfred or James's American version of Byron, Jeffrey Aspern (Rowe 1984, 85–118). In *Daisy Miller* and *The Aspern Papers*,

James locates the problem of women's failed rebellion in the ruins of classical antiquity. The relationship between gender and these classical Italian settings has no rational basis, but it works by strange association or contamination: progressive women seem thereby "warned" by James with signs of ancient Rome's or Renaissance Venice's "failure."

James's snide comment about the women neoclassical sculptors as a "white marmorean flock" may suggest that he viewed their work as deeply derivative, mere copies of classical models or, even worse, copies of the male copiers. Hosmer's sculptures are exquisite, technically and formally brilliant nineteenth-century versions of classical sources, but in style and neoclassical intent they differ little from William Wetmore Story's sculptures. Whatever political content their sculptures may have had for viewers, both of them minimized such political connotations, usually invoking instead the universals of beauty and truth. To be sure, a contemporary like Margaret Fuller had insisted on a venerable heritage of powerful women, both in myth and history, to advocate for women's rightful places in the public sphere. Elizabeth Ellet's *Women Artists in All Ages and Countries* (1859) follows Fuller's lead and includes a chapter on Maria Louisa Lander. But for many of their male contemporaries, the best many of these women sculptors in Rome were able to do was to contribute to cultural trends already well underway. Hawthorne's infamous criticism of the "mad scribbling tribe" of women writers of domestic and sentimental fiction seems echoed in James's reference to the "white marmorean flock" (Ticknor 1913, 141).

Henry James hardly reveres the classical education so central to a man of his social class. During the James family's residence in Geneva from 1859–60, William was enrolled in the Geneva Academy, an equivalent to the university, but sixteen-year-old Henry, "his Latin apparently insufficient for admission to the Gymnasium," was sent to the polytechnical school (Kaplan 1992, 41). His works have sufficient classical and biblical references to demonstrate his cultural literacy, but the interesting part of his uses of both the classics and the Bible is to denigrate their venerable meanings. In *The Golden Bowl* (1904), the novel's titular object differs from the vessel in *Ecclesiastes* because it is forever flawed for James, never redeemed by Christian salvation, just as his title *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) refers less to Christian salvation than the human forgiveness Milly Theale offers Kate and Merton, her two best friends who have cheated her in fundamental and venal ways. James's *The Sacred Fount* (1901)

refers to the font of Egeria, the legendary nymph who advised the Sabine second king of Rome, Numa Pompilius, regarding political laws and religious rituals, but in his novella this sacred source refers to the sexual liaisons among socialites who vampirishly draw vitality from their partners. The early stories, especially those just preceding *Daisy Miller* and drawing on James's recent experiences in Italy, toss about references to the emperor Tiberius ("Adina") and the Roman goddess Juno ("The Last of the Valerii") in ways that stress how the Romans brought about their own decline (Rowe 2002, 102–12).

In these respects, James follows the English Romantics and to a lesser extent the American transcendentalists, all of whom accepted the historical argument that fatal flaws within the Roman Empire led to its tyranny and collapse. Yet all of these nineteenth-century writers remained deeply interested in the Roman Empire, because most of them imagined their own cultural home to promise a new *imperium*, whether it was the British Empire or American democracy. James endorses these views, especially in the early years of his career when he remained profoundly indebted to his Romantic forebears. Like the English Romantics and the American transcendentalists, James advocated the superiority of modern western democracy (Rowe 2012, 207–13).

What, then, might James have expected a truly revolutionary woman to have *done*? And in what sense might such rebellion have warranted his praise, perhaps even been a worthy equivalent of Byron's genius, rather than his scandalous sexual misadventures? In many respects, this question expresses well the problem Daisy and her popular archetype, "the American Girl," posed for Henry James. Winterbourne meets Giovanelli at Daisy's funeral "in the little Protestant cemetery, by an angle of the wall of imperial Rome, beneath the cypresses and the thick spring-flowers" (*Daisy Miller* 91). As John Lyon notes in his modern edition of *Daisy Miller*, Testaccio Cemetery lies "at the foot of the Pyramid of Gaius Cestius, south of the Aventine, is the first cemetery granted by the popes for non-Catholic Italians and foreigners . . . [and] is the burial place of Keats and Shelley" (James 2001, 583 n. 60). James anticipates the rhetorical mastery of his later works with this lapidary reference to the English Romantics, classical Rome, and European Christendom. With the funereal cypresses countered by the seasonal rebirth of flowers, James establishes a scene of mourning that also points beyond the "ruins" of history. Nine years later during his own tour of Rome, Thomas

Hardy would compose the poem quoted in my epigraph, reminding British tourists how ancient Rome's monuments had become landmarks for the greater achievements of British culture and empire.

But how does Daisy deserve such a celebrated location, unless we assume James's selection of this venerable cemetery typically integrates his irony into a credible conclusion? Her burial in Testaccio reminds us of the principal reason a young American Protestant would never have considered marriage to an Italian Catholic. The site is also a key to what she ought to have done, had she followed her Romantic predecessors, just as Henry James himself was attempting to do in this early work. James's spare reference to the cemetery nevertheless invokes Shelley's famous elegy for Keats, "Adonaïs" (1821), especially stanzas 49–50, in which Shelley celebrates British cultural greatness amid the ruins of ancient Rome:⁹

Go thou to Rome,—at once the Paradise,
The grave, the city, and the wilderness;
And where its wrecks like shattered mountains rise,
And flowering weeds, and fragrant copses dress
The bones of Desolation's nakedness
Pass, till the spirit of the spot shall lead
Thy footsteps to a slope of green access
Where, like an infant's smile, over the dead
A light of laughing flowers along the grass is spread; . . .

Shelley, "Adonaïs," xlix, 433–41

Daisy can hardly claim to be a version of Shelley's Romantic resurrection of his dead friend, Keats, and the cultural heritage both poets helped Britain revive from the ruins of Rome. James does not permit her to do anything other than mildly disturb the proprieties of American expatriate society by what its members consider her outrageous sexual behavior. Yet there are hints in the text that Daisy's promise is neither the sexual and political revolution proposed by nineteenth-century women's rights activists nor the aesthetic revolution of the Anglo-American Romantics. James suggests instead a more broadly conceived democratic revolution that might begin with the provincialism of the expatriate communities in Geneva and Rome, but would match the broader nationalist movements throughout nineteenth-century Europe, inspired in part by the American

⁹ I quote Shelley 1970, 442.

Revolution. When Winterbourne first meets Daisy at the grand hotel in Vevey, on the shores of Lake Geneva, she displays an extraordinary interest in people outside her own class. She tells Winterbourne that she first learned of his Aunt Costello from her chambermaid (*Daisy Miller* 28), insists that they take the train or the steamer to the Castle of Chillon in order to be with other people, and meets him for their excursion in the hotel lobby, where "the couriers, the servants, the foreign tourists were lounging about and staring" (39). When understood as Daisy's democratic interest in people of all backgrounds, her familiarity with Eugenio, the family's personal guide, seems less sexual than political.¹⁰

While touring the castle, Daisy shows little interest in its history, despite Winterbourne's effort to tell her "something of the story of the unhappy Bonnivard" (*Daisy Miller* 42). "The history of Bonnivard had evidently, as they say, gone into one ear and out of the other" (42), but it is not Daisy's knowledge of history that matters but her interest in Winterbourne: we find her "asking her young man sudden questions about himself, his family, his previous history, his tastes, his habits, his designs, and for supplying information on corresponding points in her own situation" (42). Winterbourne assumes, of course, that Daisy's bold interest is sexual, rather than social, setting the stage for James's brilliant representation of how Winterbourne's sexual desire and jealousy prevent him from recognizing Daisy's "own tastes, habits, and designs" (42). At the end of the narrative, Mrs. Miller conveys Daisy's final message to Winterbourne: "'And then she told me to ask if you remembered the time you went up to that castle in Switzerland'" (91). In his final meeting with his aunt Mrs. Costello, back again at Vevey, Winterbourne interprets the meaning of this message: "'She sent me a message before her death which I didn't understand at the time. But I've understood it since. She would have appreciated one's esteem'" (93). Mrs. Costello concludes too quickly "that she would have reciprocated one's affection," but

¹⁰ James refers to Eugenio as the Millers' "courier," a term that in the 1870s would mean literally a paid servant or guide, but the connotations of a diplomatic aide and military spy are also carried by the term. James would play with such diplomatic meanings at great length in his later novel, *The Ambassadors* (1903), in which Lambert Strether's errand to bring Mrs. Newsome's son, Chad, home from Paris is treated in the extended metaphor of a diplomatic mission.

Winterbourne's refusal to answer her directly indicates that there is another, more profound meaning (93).

That unspoken meaning seems to stress the message of individual liberty and political equality Daisy attempted to communicate to Winterbourne in their early encounters in Switzerland. These sentiments seem quite similar to conventional Romantic ideas in Shelley's "Ode to Liberty" (1820), with its epigraph from Byron, and to the emancipatory rhetoric of Byron's *The Prisoner of Chillon*.¹¹ And of course the biographical facts of Shelley, Keats, and Byron's living in Switzerland and Italy in the last years of their lives, and choosing both Swiss and classical Roman subjects to represent their own modern democratic aspirations, must have influenced James's selection of these two settings for the novella. The history of François Bonnavard's imprisonment in the Castle of Chillon for his rebellion against Charles III, Duke of Savoy, is interpreted by Byron as an early example of the democratic revolutions that would reshape late eighteenth-century Europe. Although a Catholic prelate, Bonnavard was a herald of the Protestant Reformation, since Geneva would become Calvin's refuge in 1533 when he fled religious persecution in France.

Winterbourne tells Daisy about Bonnavard as they tour the castle, but he has apparently forgotten how the Calvinism of the region is associated with their common Protestant American backgrounds. Daisy may know nothing about Bonnavard, but her behavior suggests someone intensely interested in other people and democratic practices. When Winterbourne finally answers his aunt Costello in the final scene of the novel, it is simply to conclude: "'You were right in that remark that you made last summer. I was booked to make a mistake. I've lived too long in foreign parts'" (*Daisy Miller* 93). The usual interpretation is that Winterbourne has learned from his failed efforts to discipline Daisy according to the conventions of American expatriate society. If Daisy is viewed as an exemplar of U.S. democratic values, then Winterbourne confesses his ignorance, not his new wisdom. He has forgotten what it means to live on an equal basis with other people, has fallen into the class hierarchies of

¹¹ Shelley's epigraph, "'Yet, Freedom, yet, thy banner, torn but flying, / Streams like a thunder-storm against the wind,'" comes from Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812–18), Canto IV, stanza 98, ll. 1–2 (Byron 1945, 240).

Europe, and has failed to respect Daisy as an individual. Such respect is what Winterbourne may understand in his own chosen word, "esteem," rather than Mrs. Costello's assumption that for a young man interested in a young woman, "esteem" must mean "affection."

James's decision to begin and conclude the dramatic action of *Daisy Miller* in Vevey on the shores of Lake Geneva is only explained in part by Switzerland's historical connection with the English Romantics. In a related sense, Switzerland was admired in the nineteenth century for its democratic history and its ability to manage polylingual and multicultural communities, including cantons dominated by Catholic and Protestant majorities. With a venerable history of independence dating back to 1291, Switzerland was occupied by France during the French Revolution and only regained its independence with the defeat of Napoleon I. In the aftermath of the European revolutions of 1847–8, which largely spared Switzerland, the country drafted a new federal constitution modeled primarily on the U.S. constitution.

Modern Switzerland thus creates a political contrast with ancient Rome. Whereas nineteenth-century Rome represented the failure of the Roman Empire, thanks to its persecution of minorities, such as Christians, and its inability to manage its conquered territories, Switzerland adapted to modern conditions, avoiding much of the violent turmoil of the transition from monarchy to nationalism due to its own history of independence. As a young man, Henry James had spent 1859–60 studying at the Institute Rochette in Geneva (Kaplan 1992, 41). James thus had some familiarity with modern Swiss democratic life.

Switzerland had also attracted the historian Edward Gibbon, who had been sent to Lausanne by his father shortly after the young Gibbon had converted to Catholicism. His father had put his son in the care of Daniel Pavillard, the Reformed pastor of Lausanne, and under threat of disinheritance the younger Gibbon had reconverted to Protestantism on Christmas Day, 1754 (Murray 1897, 137). Gibbon's religious experience in Switzerland, his friendship with Jacques Georges Deyverdun, and his frustrated romance with Suzanne Curchod led to his lifetime attachment to Lausanne, where he would complete the sixth and final volume of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88). James makes no reference to Gibbon or his influential history of the Roman Empire, but like the English Romantics coming after him, Gibbon would find Switzerland a site of religious and cultural tolerance, as well as a

moderate haven amid the violence of the French Revolution and a stark contrast with the tyranny of ancient Rome.

All of these threads cannot be woven fully into a new Daisy Miller. As a young, uneducated woman from a wealthy Schenectady, New York family, she hardly matches the revolutionary poetics and practices of such English Romantics as Byron and Shelley. As a tourist who dashes through such venerable sites as the Castle of Chillon, the Roman Colosseum, and the Vatican, she cannot match the English poets and historians who would meditate on the future of Great Britain as measured against the historical struggles of early Christians and Protestant reformers. As a blundering socialite in expatriate American communities in Switzerland and Rome, she hardly measures up to the women's rights activism of Margaret Fuller reporting on the Italian Revolution and the defiant Maria Louisa Lander facing down her American critics in Rome. Insofar as she epitomizes the popular stereotype of "the American Girl," Daisy Miller still represents what Henry James considered the superficiality of much women's rights activism in the late nineteenth century.

To the extent that Henry James himself identifies with his venerable predecessors, he does so primarily with Byron, Shelley, Keats, Bonnivard, and Gibbon, all men who have achieved the greatness to which James himself aspired. But in a final sense, Daisy Miller in all of her ordinariness exceeds what Henry James imagined he could control and discipline, much as she escapes the "romance" Winterbourne fantasized he might possess in her. Insofar as Daisy Miller expresses James's own radical departure from the classical world and his endorsement of democratic modernity, she ended up defining his career and haunting his imagination. There are, after all, few masculine characters in James's *oeuvre* who attract our admiration or even interest. It is James's feminine characters who have made him an enduring author, and Daisy is their enduring prototype.

The Pleasures and Punishments of Roman Error

Emperor Elagabalus at the Court of Early Cinema

Maria Wyke

On Sunday November 5, 1911, the high-society newspaper *Le Gaulois* drew to the attention of its Parisian readers an exciting package of films showing at 2:30 p.m. that afternoon at the Gaumont Palace in Place de Clichy. The variety program would include: “‘Elagabalus,’ a grand Roman spectacle; Gaumont’s talking films; for the first time, ‘A sensational chase in an aeroplane with Legagneux piloting and Martinet at the gun’; ‘A catastrophe in Pennsylvania’; ‘A town destroyed by a flood.’”¹ The following week a periodical of the French film industry, *Ciné-Journal*, carried a full-page spread provided by the Gaumont company that further advertised the first of these films as a “grand drama in color” of 200 meters (that is, one reel of about eight minutes’ duration). Beneath the alternative title *The Roman Orgy* (*L’Orgie Romaine*), a production still displayed the garlanded and bejeweled emperor surrounded by his praetorian guard. Elagabalus cowers on his couch before the soldiers’

¹ *Le Gaulois* (November 5, 1911, p. 3): “‘Héliogabale,’ grande scène romaine; les films-parlants Gaumont; pour la première fois, ‘Une chasse sensationnelle en aéroplane avec Legagneux au volant et Martinet au fusil’; ‘Une catastrophe en Pensylvanie’; ‘Une ville détruite par une inondation.’” Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own. For convenience, I shall call the emperor by his customary Latin name “Elagabalus” although the film draws on its Greek version to identify him as “Héliogabale.”

commander who, with sword menacingly unsheathed in his right hand, points accusingly at him with his left.² The grand Roman drama was being projected in an equally grand neo-Roman edifice, for the recently inaugurated Gaumont Palace cinema had once been a Hippodrome, whose giant arena had accommodated equestrian exhibitions and circus shows, including the chariot races of the historical spectacular “Vercingétorix.”³

Cinema deserves a place in this volume’s discussions of Roman error and the perceived errors of Rome’s reception. Early cinema immersed its spectators back into ancient Rome with an unsettling immediacy and, at the same time, brought previous receptions of ancient Rome into the modern world. At the beginning of the twentieth century, cinema was introducing into modern culture a radically new way of seeing that would profoundly alter ideas of time, space, materiality, and art (Elsaesser 1990, 1). Visual, kinetic, ephemeral, and urban, cinema encapsulated the attributes of modernity (Charney and Schwartz 1995, 1–12). Yet cinema was not just innovative and modern: it was also intermedial. It emerged out of, and in competition with, the art forms and optical devices of the previous century. In the ancient world of the nineteenth-century historical novel, painting, sculpture, dance, theater, and opera, cinema repeatedly sought not only familiar and exciting content but also cultural legitimation and supposed moral uplift (Michelakis and Wyke 2013, 5–7). Thus the Roman world brought to life on the screen should be understood against, and casts light on, other modalities of ancient Rome’s reception.

This chapter explores early cinema, and the short French film *The Roman Orgy*, as an intricate and enticing point of entry into Roman error. The emperor Elagabalus incarnated extreme transgressions of gender, religion, and imperial power in ancient historiographic narratives of Roman degeneracy and decline. *The Roman Orgy* re-envisioned a

² *Ciné-Journal* (November 11, 1911, 4.168, p. 379). Elsewhere in the same edition (p. 411) and in that for the week after (November 18, 1911, 4.169, p. 489), the film is advertised as part of a different variety package that includes two dramas, one romance, four comedies, and a documentary.

³ An article in *Ciné-Journal* for October 7, 1911 (pp. 9, 11) declares that the glorious debut of the Hippodrome, when it hosted grand spectacles such as “Vercingétorix” and “Jules César,” has not been forgotten now that the building has been turned into a veritable people’s temple of cinema.

selection of his errors partly in order to counter charges made against the early French film industry of commercial mistakes and moral failings. Yet, while the film evoked contemporary discourses of national decline and aspiration to regeneration in its concluding punishment of the emperor, it first lingered pleasurably over the display of his imperial decadence. Using a Roman emperor as its convenient and lucrative instrument, early cinema could both overcome and wallow in its own sins.

The Virtues and Vices of French Cinema

The Roman Orgy was shown at the Gaumont Palace about a month after the building was inaugurated as the principal cinema of France and the largest in the world. The genre painter Louis Abel-Truchet captured impressionistically the new street scenes afforded by this event (Figure 10.1). The ladies and gentlemen of Paris, dressed in fashionable attire, crowd towards the cinema's majestic entrance which is brilliantly illuminated in the night. Their eagerness would have been met by a wealth of luxuries within: Pompeian-style decoration; vibrant sky-blue hues; foyers and galleries for promenading; a vast hall capable of seating 3,400 spectators; a program of varied genres and emotions; and a large ensemble of musicians and singers to accompany it.⁴ The painting also makes manifest the strategy of gentrification on which the French film industry had recently embarked. A Hippodrome is redesigned as a "temple of cinema,"⁵ a palace of electric lights is rendered in oils; popular culture is transmuted into high art.⁶

From the outset, filmmakers were all too aware of the contempt in which their purportedly vulgar moving images could be held and they sometimes responded with mischievous self-reflection. By 1905, for example, the temptation of Saint Anthony had become a recurring theme in the film programs exhibited at urban café-concerts and the country fairs that traveled across France. In a version released that year by Pathé-Frères, the saint at prayer is suddenly accosted by the devil

⁴ On the pleasures of the Gaumont Palace, see Meusy 1995, esp. 285–91; Abel 1994, 31–2; Moine 2009, 201. On Abel-Truchet's painting of it, see Blom 2008, 308.

⁵ See n. 3 above for the contemporary description of the Gaumont Palace as a "*temple populaire de la cinématographie*."

⁶ As Blom 2008, 308 observes.



Figure 10.1 *The Gaumont palace lit up in the evening (Le Gaumont Palace illuminé dans la nuit).* Louis-Abel Truchet, 1911. Huile sur toile. Paris, musée Carnavalet.

© Musée Carnavalet/Roger-Viollet.

(resplendent in his horned hat).⁷ The devil directs Anthony to look at a series of images that are now projected, by means of superimposition, onto a painted backdrop to the left of the film frame. Seated on a stool, the saint refuses to take in what the film's spectators are free to gaze upon with pleasure—a sequence of girls rotating their naked breasts towards and away from the camera as they move diagonally up screen as if in flight. The film ends, and the devil and his erotic temptations disappear, once Anthony brandishes his crucifix at them. Such films literalized and

⁷ The version of the film I have seen survives in the Cineteca Sperimentale di Cinematografia, Rome and is listed as *La tentazione di Sant' Antonio*, directed by Vincent-Lorant Heilbronn.

subjected to ridicule the charge that cinema was the invention of the devil.⁸ The French film studios, however, gradually developed a more serious and systematic response to accusations of immorality. Permanent cinemas were established in which to host mixed programs that would contain at least one featured attraction capable of laying claim to cultural prestige and the edification of the middle-class audiences now being sought. To secure cultural cachet, to attract the higher social classes, to increase ticket prices and sales, Pathé-Frères boasted of inspiration from the stage and Gaumont from both theater and painting (hence, in mid-November 1911, the company's selection of *The Roman Orgy* from out of that week's film program to advertise as "a grand drama in color").⁹

The *film d'art* movement which began around 1907, and which Pathé-Frères came quickly to support, encouraged the preparation of scenarios for featured attractions that were based on recent theatrical successes (especially historical dramas), the utilization of sumptuous decor and costumes that attended closely to period detail, and the performance on screen of reputed actors from the Comédie Française. In the sardonic words of two film historians writing in the 1930s (Bardèche and Brasillach 1938, 43), with these strategies for improvement "cinema was bidding farewell to tents and circuses in order to woo a buskined Muse."¹⁰ In the years that followed, Gaumont developed a similar policy, publishing a manifesto in July 1909 for a series of films that would deliver for cinema "a theatrical evolution towards Life and towards Truth."¹¹ The manifesto for "*théâtre-film*" was soon replaced in May 1910 by one for "*film esthétique*," written by Louis Feuillade (who was to direct *The Roman Orgy* for Gaumont the following year). Gaumont's next films, he promised, would be fittingly pictorial rather than theatrical because it is in the

⁸ Cosandey, Gaudreault, and Gunning acknowledge this charge in the title of their edited collection on early cinema, *Une invention du diable? Cinéma des premiers temps et religion* (1992), but none of the essays directly consider the reflection on such charges evident in the films about the temptations inflicted upon Saint Anthony.

⁹ Similarly, Christie 2013, 113 notes that in February 1912 a London cinema gave top billing to a "coloured drama" about the Roman tribune Licinius in a program that also comprised four comedies, a documentary on science, a western, and another drama.

¹⁰ On Pathé-Frères and the *film d'art* movement, see Abel 1996, 118–19 and 199–202; D'Hautcourt 2006, 112 and 117–18; Salmon 2014, esp. 256–65.

¹¹ "L'évolution théâtrale vers la vie et vers la vérité." The manifesto for "*Le théâtre-film*" appeared in *Ciné-Journal* n. 46, July 4–10, 1909, pp. 5–6, on which see Bastide 2008, 306–8.

nature of the cinematograph to address itself to our eyes; they would realize “Beauty of Thought, Beauty of Form.”¹² Thus Feuillade would fasten on the emperor Elagabalus (among other historical subjects) as an opportunity for the cinematograph to set foot on the legitimizing path of Truth and Beauty, and to correct its earlier ethical and aesthetic deviancy.¹³ Yet, I would argue, Elagabalus was a suitable subject for the Gaumont director to film not only because the emperor had been frequently depicted in the narratives and the illustrations of novels, on the stage, and in paintings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also because his representation provided an opportunity playfully to preserve some of the sins of cinema—to carry on the devil’s work.

The Truths and Falsehoods of Roman Historiography

The aspiration to “Truth” and “Beauty” to which early French cinema laid claim was based on its exploitation of themes and forms from the high arts. When Louis Feuillade turned to the production of his grand drama in color about the orgies of Elagabalus, he had at his disposal a curiously dense clustering of receptions of the Roman emperor that had taken shape in France between 1888 and 1911. Sustained interest in this fabulous yet paradoxically inconsequential figure of Roman history was expressed in, for example: the historical novels *L’agonie* (1888) by Jean Lombard, *La dernière nuit de Héliogabale* (1889) by Louis Jourdan, and *L’Élagabal* (1910) by Henry Mirande; a novel with a contemporary setting by the pseudonymous Jean Lorraine, *Le vice errant* (1902); a collection of ancient sources by Georges Duviquet entitled *Héliogabale raconté par les historiens grecs et latins* (1903); a spectacular lyric opera *Héliogabale* in three acts inspired by Lombard’s novel (with libretto written by Émile Sicard and music composed by Déodat de Séverac) which was performed in Béziers in 1910 and in Paris the year after; and

¹² “*Beauté de l’idée, beauté de la form.*” The manifesto for “*Le film esthétique*” appeared in *Ciné-Journal* n. 92, May 28, 1910, p. 19, on which see Abel 1994, 20; Lacassin 1995, 104–13; D’Hautcourt 2006, 107–8, 112–13, 118; Bastide 2008, 315–17.

¹³ Aknin 2000 offers a survey of the c.30 films set in antiquity that Feuillade made between 1908 and 1913 and reproduces as an appendix the original scenario for *Héliogabale—L’orgie romaine*.

even another film *Héliogabale* (1910) directed by André Calmettes for the rival company Film d'Art.¹⁴

Such works, in turn, had at their disposal ancient accounts of a Roman emperor like no other. According to the histories of Cassius Dio and Herodian, and the biography questionably ascribed to Aelius Lampridius (the *Vita Heliogabali*), every act of Elagabalus was evil and base; he was more monstrous even than Caligula, Nero, or Commodus; he was the worst of Rome's emperors. A recent, detailed (if rather idiosyncratic), analysis of the classical sources by Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado, *The Emperor Elagabalus: Fact or Fiction?* (2010), opens with a vivid catalogue of the kind of accusations that the ancient texts assemble and which this modern work proposes to dismantle:

Breaches of protocol and precedent; importing a solar cult to Rome, seeking to impose it as an exclusive monotheism; murdering prominent men and comely boys; throwing human genitals to beasts; polymorphous sexual perversity, active and passive, mutual and collective, with males and females; refusal to wage war; dancing; driving a chariot; wearing make-up and silk; wedding the sun god, whose high priest he was, to the moon goddess; building palaces to use but once and destroy; holding dinners for ten bald, fat, or ruptured men; holding conventions for prostitutes of either gender; collecting tons of spider webs, or jarsful of flies; appointing officers of state on the basis of phallic size; selling state appointments; spending more than any previous emperor on banquets and shows for the populace; serving his toadies with glass replicas of food, and, when bored with his guests, smothering them beneath an avalanche of flowers.¹⁵

Classical scholarship, as Charles Martindale has observed (2013, 171), is itself a category of reception that engages with the ancient world and has the capacity to change that world and its inhabitants. Studies like that of de Arrizabalaga y Prado and Martijn Icks, *The Crimes of Elagabalus: The Life and Legacy of Rome's Decadent Boy Emperor* (2011), work to peel away antiquity's own falsehoods and to demonstrate that many of the errors of Elagabalus are themselves erroneous. An effective *damnatio memoriae* ordered by Elagabalus' successor has left us with few sources, among which the literary accounts are hostile in the extreme. Modern

¹⁴ For an explosion of interest in Elagabalus in France during this period, see Oswald 1949; de Palacio 2001, 117–18; David 2001, 217–23; David-de Palacio 2005, 183–229; D'Hautcourt 2006, 114–16; Icks 2011, 148–79; Dumenil 2012, 284–5.

¹⁵ De Arrizabalaga y Prado 2010, 1. On the peculiarities and inconsistencies of his investigation into the historical Elagabalus, see e.g. the review by Noreña 2012.

scholarship assesses the fabulous narratives woven around the emperor against the surviving papyri, coins, inscriptions, sculpture, monuments, and topography, and strips them down to reveal the “real” Elagabalus—or what we now think we can know about him and the events of his reign. The colorful “creature of fiction” is transformed into a somewhat paler “character of fact.”¹⁶

The core of historical truth that emerges from this process is small and soft (because still pliable), yet it is nonetheless extraordinary.¹⁷ The emperor who reigned at Rome for four years during the early third century CE most probably was born Varius Avitus Bassianus. He originated from an elite family in the Syrian town of Emesa where as a child he was dedicated to serve as the priest of the local sun god Elagabal.¹⁸ In May 218 CE, he was acclaimed emperor by mutinous soldiers of the Roman Legion III Gallica who were garrisoned nearby. On the pretense of being an illegitimate son of the earlier emperor Caracalla, and as index of his rightful membership of the Antonine dynasty, he took the official title Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. Emerging victorious from the ensuing civil war against the incumbent emperor Macrinus, he gained imperial power when he was fourteen years old. On arrival at Rome, he instituted the worship of Elagabal and acted as the god’s chief priest. Thus an *aureus* minted at Rome somewhere between 220 and 222 CE represents on its obverse the emperor’s youthful bust facing right, draped, cuirassed, and laureate, and carries a legend designating him as *PIUS* or dutiful (Figure 10.2).¹⁹ The reverse demonstrates how deserving that epithet is—the Semitic god (who is represented not by an anthropomorphic statue but by a conical stone) sits behind a spread-winged eagle and is borne triumphant on a cart drawn by four horses pacing left. The star visible high above the parading horses may mark the event as a sacred ritual initiated by the emperor for the divinity who is thus designated

¹⁶ The distinction is that made by de Arrizabalaga y Prado throughout his study, which also utilizes a disturbingly categorical opposition between the supposed fictions of historiography and the truths of artifacts (see the concerns of Noreña 2012). Yet artifacts can also lie. Icks 2011 and Mader 2005 are less dismissive of the literary sources’ historical value.

¹⁷ The following account relies mainly on Icks 2011, 9–43.

¹⁸ Icks 2011, 59 explains that Varius was known only much later by either the Latin (Elagabalus) or the Greek (Heliogabale) form of the name of his Semitic god.

¹⁹ The *aureus* is registered in the British Museum’s catalogue as no. 1864, 1128.288. See also Mattingly 1975, 560 (= RE5 197, p. 560) and Mattingly et al. 1986, 32 (= RIC4, 61, p. 32).



Figure 10.2 Gold coin, Rome, 220–2. Obv. Bust of Elagabalus. Rev. Triumphal car carrying eagle and conical stone.

© The Trustees of the British Museum.

CONSERVATOR AVG (or “protector of the august [emperor]”).²⁰ Elagabalus brought his sun god to Rome, built him a vast temple on the Palatine, bestowed upon him Jupiter’s role as supreme deity of the Roman pantheon, and became officially his “highest priest-emperor” (Icks 2011, 26). Four years later, in March 222 CE, he was assassinated by soldiers of his imperial guard. His cousin, the new emperor Severus Alexander, ordered an extravagant *damnatio memoriae*: the erasure of the name Marcus Aurelius Antoninus from inscriptions and documents, the destruction of the boy’s images, and the reversal of his religious reforms. The conical stone was returned to Syria.

Over the centuries, that historical core remained wrapped in ancient accretions of fantasy that became the truth about Rome.²¹ From the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, from Machiavelli to Gibbon, Elagabalus was portrayed with conviction as the ultimate tyrant (Icks 2011, 123–47). At the start of the twentieth century, when historians were comparing classical historiography with artifactual sources and subjecting the former to some critical scrutiny (Icks 2011, 148), the first modern work on the emperor—a collection of literary and non-literary sources published in Paris in 1903—contains no assessment of the evidence by its editor Georges Duviquet. Its title, however, *Héliogabale raconté par les historiens grecs et latins, dix-huit gravures d’après les monuments*

²⁰ See de Arrizabalaga y Prado 2010, 59–105 for detailed discussion and illustrations of the coinage of Elagabalus, esp. fig. 36 and pp. 76–7. Cf. Icks 2011, 17 and 78.

²¹ I am most grateful to Basil Dufallo for this way of formulating my point.

originaux, may contain within it the suggestion that the emperor is little more than an accumulation of stories (“*Héliogabale raconté*” or “Elagabalus narrated”). In the preface, the celebrated writer and critic Remy de Gourmont pronounces a judgment milder, but no less fanciful, than that of the classical texts he is introducing. The emperor was not despotic, murderous, cruel, greedy, or intolerant, but he was a corrupted Syrian, a debauched priest, and an adolescent able to draw on limitless wealth. Desiccated by the heat of the Orient, kicking against the control of his female family members, he was a child trying to amuse himself. Not a mediocre figure, he was *the* emperor of extravagance.²²

The fantastical quality of both the ancient sources on Elagabalus and his consequent *Nachleben* is not grounds for the dismissal of either. Their joint exploration, as Martijn Icks argues (2011, 4–5), sheds light on the strategies by which ancient Rome has been imagined and reimagined, and their purposes. The errors of the emperors have been vital components in the writing of imperial Rome. Both Greek and Roman historiography established moral taxonomies to differentiate legitimate from illegitimate power. The illegitimate ruler was patched together through the use of standard literary *topoi*, such as usurpation, violation of Roman senatorial traditions, cruelty and favoritism, effeminacy, sexual perversity, and a prodigious appetite for luxury and pleasure. In the case of Elagabalus, it was possible to interweave the conventional narrative of deviancy with the dependency and capriciousness of a child, the shocking despotism, adornment, cosmetics, and habits of an Oriental, a fanatical devotion to an alien religious cult, and the offensive practice of its bizarre rituals—thus fabricating so extreme and pornographic a portrait as to guarantee that readers would judge him a false Antonine.²³ Additionally, the fourth-century *Historia Augusta*, of which the *Vita Heliogabali* forms a part, establishes across its series of imperial biographies a teleological narrative heading towards degeneracy, decline, and renewal. As one *malus princeps* replaces another, their emblematic vices become progressively more refined and extreme until Elagabalus is reached as the

²² “*Un enfant qui s’amuse*” (11); “*l’empereur de l’extravagance*” (9). On de Gourmont’s preface, see David-de Palacio 2005, 222–4 and Icks 2011, 182.

²³ On the literary *topoi* utilized in classical texts to depict Elagabalus as an extreme version of an illegitimate ruler, see Barrow 2001, 134; Mader 2005, 136 and 139–42; D’Hautcourt 2006, 110; Pasetti 2006; de Arrizabalaga y Prado 2010, 27–46; Icks 2011, 92–122.

dazzlingly outlandish climax. He is condemned as *Antoninorum ultimus in summa impuritate uixisse memoratur* ("the last of the Antonines, who is said to have lived in the lowest depths of foulness," *Vita Macrini* 7).²⁴ In contrast to his virtuous and benign successor Severus Alexander, Elagabalus is (as put expressively by Gottfried Mader) "the grand satrap of pleasure, the cross-dressing, gender-bending, convention-defying showman who turns the Principate on its head and into an amusement park, an endless skein of absurdity in which symbolics takes over from reality" (2005, 151). He is also, in historiographic terms, "an exercise in amplification, a *topos* run amok" (Mader 2005, 151).²⁵

Cinematic Punishments and French Nationalism

Now that the fabulous emperor of the *Vita Heliogabali* is better understood as the rhetorical climax of a classical narrative which emplots the political and moral decline of the Roman Empire, his ideological utility for French cinema in 1911 becomes correspondingly more intelligible. *The Roman Orgy* is not obviously identifiable as a condensation into a single reel of a specific French novel, play, or opera about Elagabalus.²⁶ Instead, it juxtaposes some scenes of the emperor's excesses whose features can be traced back ultimately to episodes in the *Vita*. Those film scenes could never have captured the exceptional libidinousness of the Roman "creature of fiction," given that film companies like Gaumont were vigilantly regulating the moral and sexual content of their products: there were to be no signs on screen of the triumph of vice, adultery, or prostitution; no murdered or bleeding human bodies; no kissing, even behind the ear (as Lacassin 1995, 93; Bastide 2008, 306). Yet they had the capacity to emplot Roman perversities, a lethal orgy, and their concluding punishment in a manner that might resonate with current French discourses of national decline and the need for renewal.

²⁴ All translations from the *Historia Augusta* are by David Magie, from *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae Vol. II* (1924, Loeb Classical Library).

²⁵ On the *Vita Heliogabali*, see in addition to Mader 2005; Pasetti 2006; Icks 2011, 6–7 and 108–15.

²⁶ Although see below for its interaction with aspects of the novel by Jean Lombard, *L'agonie* (1888).

The opening intertitle of *The Roman Orgy* declares: "Rome year 218. The debauched emperor presides over the debates of a Senate of women charged with deliberating about fashion and the duties of courtesans."²⁷ The *Vita Heliogabali* consistently presents Elagabalus as an emperor who demonstrates utter contempt for the Roman senate, not least when he establishes a *senaculum* or "little senate" of women whose responsibility it is to decree matters of feminine style and protocol (*Heliogab.* 4.3–4).²⁸ The film's intertitles express the emperor's trivialization of power through the immediacy of the present tense and through a clash between feminine agency and terms for government. The ensuing scene presents the emperor (played by Jean Ayme) and his court of festive women engaged in gestures of mutual admiration over the elaborate and beautifully colorized costumes they are all wearing—his more exotic than theirs. When the "senators" then gather round in adoration of their emperor, their movement renders more noticeable a soldier who is pacing back and forth on guard beyond the pillars, outside the imperial palace. Proper military masculinity is performed only in the background as, in stark contrast, femininity and effeminacy are celebrated front screen.²⁹

The camera has moved in closer in the second scene in order to showcase the emperor's effeminate and Orientalized appearance, his fastidious concern with its maintenance, and his capricious and cruel exercise of power. Lying on a couch, Elagabalus caresses the young manicurist painting his fingernails but condemns to death the young pedicurist who accidentally nicks his toes (Figure 10.3). The intertitles augment the drama by breaking out on two occasions into dialogue: "You scratched me, you deserve to die!" . . . "To the lions!"³⁰ In the third connected scene, the camera captures a disconcerting shot that unfolds on two levels: from

²⁷ "Rome, l'an 218. L'empereur débauché préside aux débats du Sénat de femmes chargé de délibérer de la mode et des devoirs des courtisanes." I am drawing on the version of the film presented as a special feature on a DVD containing Louis Feuillade's better-known crime serial *Les vampires*. The DVD was released in the U.K. by Artificial Eye. I have also seen a version of the film held by EYE (Film Institute Netherlands) that goes by the title *Die Löwen des Tyrannen* ("The Lions of the Tyrant") and contains intertitles in German which differ in interesting ways from the French. I do not engage here in discussion of the variants and the adaptation of the film for national audiences other than the French.

²⁸ On the establishment of the feminine *senaculum*, and the emperor's scorn for the masculine traditions of the Roman senate, see Mader 2005, 137; Pasetti 2006; Icks 2011, 18–19 and 110–11.

²⁹ For discussion of this sequence, see also D'Hautcourt 2006, 109.

³⁰ "Tu m'as égratigné, tu mérites la mort!" . . . "Aux lions!"



Figure 10.3 The emperor condemns a slave to death, *The Roman Orgy or L'orgie romaine* (Gaumont, France, 1911, dir. Louis Feuillade).

Still from Collection: EYE Filmmuseum, the Netherlands.

the balcony of his private arena, the emperor and his court of women look down with eager anticipation at the lions beneath; after the poor boy is thrust into the arena, they react variously to his off-screen mauling (the emperor with exceptional delight).³¹ Likewise in the *Vita*, women act in the masculine sphere of government, while Elagabalus is looked upon in the feminine sphere of his toilette: he wears garments laden with jewelry or threaded luxuriously with gold or purple; even his shoes are adorned with etched gems; he loves diadems because he considers that they set off the feminine beauty of his face (*Heliogab.* 5.4–5).³²

The next couple of film scenes merge together two separate anecdotes from the *Vita Heliogabali* concerning the vicious tricks the emperor used to play on his dinner guests: “In a banqueting-room with a reversible ceiling he once overwhelmed his parasites with violets and other flowers,

³¹ D'Hautcourt 2006, 109 discusses these two scenes.

³² Mader 2005, 137 and Icks 2011, 50 and 111 discuss the interest in bodily adornment exhibited by the Elagabalus of the classical sources.

so that some of them were actually smothered to death, being unable to crawl out to the top" (*Heliogab.* 21.5); "Among his pets he had lions and leopards, which had been rendered harmless and trained by tamers, and these he would suddenly order during the dessert and the after-dessert to get up on the couches, thereby causing an amusing panic, for none knew that the beasts were harmless" (*Heliogab.* 21.1). The *Vita* deprives the emperor's banquets of any political or ritual purpose and, instead, presents them as a site for theatrical expressions of Elagabalus' contempt for the social orders and his pursuit of a spectacular degeneracy (Mader 2005, 137–8 and 152–61). Gaumont's director, Louis Feuillade, reverses the sequence and the effects described in the classical text, so that first rose petals fall and then the lions kill. He also exceeds the conventions of theatrical space by staging his banquet scene in height and depth. In a large hall, the emperor's guests are arranged in the foreground carousing around some small tables on which dancers soon pirouette gracefully. Above and in the right background of the frame, the emperor and his favorites preside over the party, watching intently as rose petals begin to fall from above in ever-increasing quantities until they almost mask the shot. When lions are suddenly released down the grand stairs positioned at the back of the three-dimensional set, the terrified guests rush out of the frame in every direction (Figure 10.4) and reappear in the adjacent scene being chased back and forth en masse through an empty vestibule by the emperor's menagerie.³³

In the finale of *The Roman Orgy*, in fitting contrast, Elagabalus is left cowering in his boudoir after his terrified courtesans have turned against him. The praetorian guard breaks in for the kill and the emperor is beheaded off-screen at their commander's order. The ending of the film follows the *Vita Heliogabali* in establishing a "causal connection between imperial depravity and military disaffection" (Mader 2005, 143), even if it does not reproduce the same location or detail for the assassination.³⁴

³³ On the scene, see also D'Hautcourt 2006, 109–10. And for the deep-space aesthetic of early French cinema, see Brewster 1990.

³⁴ The *Vita Heliogabali* sets the unique squalor of the emperor's death and disposal (discovered and killed in a palace latrine, his corpse dragged through the streets and thrust unsuccessfully into a sewer before being weighed down and tossed into the Tiber, 17.1–3) against his aspiration to a beautiful suicide (such as leaping from a specially constructed tower onto jeweled and gilded boards beneath, 33.6). For which see Mader 2005, 164–5; Pasetti 2006; Icks 2011, 37–43.



Figure 10.4 The emperor's guests just before they flee from the lions which will be released suddenly into the banquet hall, *The Roman Orgy* or *L'orgie romaine* (Gaumont, France, 1911, dir. Louis Feuillade).

Still from Collection: EYE Filmmuseum, the Netherlands.

The film, therefore, also adopts the moralizing drive of the *Vita*, offering an episodic chronicle of debauchery that appears destined for the punishment meted out at the close.³⁵ Moral order is revived and foregrounded: the singularly cruel and cowardly effeminate is overcome by a collective, virile masculinity, marked on screen by the shining breastplates, plumed helmets, and plunging spears of the soldiers.³⁶

In the persistence of its debt to the *Vita Heliogabali*, Feuillade's grand drama stakes a claim to high art, moral purpose, and contemporary

³⁵ The previous film about the emperor, *Héliogabale* (1910, dir. André Calmettes), is equally moralizing but presents a tighter plot structure concerning the emperor's attraction to, abduction of, and attempt to molest, a Vestal Virgin. His assassination is presented as a direct consequence of this attempt at sexual assault and sticks closer to the ancient accounts of his death (while remaining less squalid): the people break into the imperial palace to rescue the Vestal, they chase the emperor through the streets, and throw him into the Tiber after the Vestal refuses him mercy. On the film, see Abel 1994, 255–6.

³⁶ On the concluding scene of *The Roman Orgy* and its relation to the *Vita*, see also D'Hautcourt 2006, 109–11.

political relevance. Across the nineteenth century, French commentators had turned to imperial Rome and its emperors as instruments through which to express and assess perceived national failure. The concept of “decadence” or “decline” (the preferred term for historians) operated within larger cyclical theories of history (Morley 2005, 573). Civilizations grow, mature, decline, die, and are reborn. Turning to the past (most often the past of ancient Rome) exposes the disease, its symptoms, and its prognosis—identified as either complete darkness or a new dawn (Morley 2005, 578–9). When confronted by a volatile succession of monarchies, republics, and empires, and military defeats like Waterloo in 1815 and Sedan in 1870, French critics diagnosed the nation as suffering from its own imperial decay, and identified Paris as the heart of its Roman degeneracy.³⁷ Elagabalus too had a part to play in representations of Roman history that were designed allegorically as a warning for France (Icks 2011, 131; David 2001, 217–23). In the novel *L’agonie* (1888), written by the socialist and political activist Jean Lombard, Elagabalus is painted, ornamented, tiaraed, androgynous, authoritarian, and Asiatic. He arrives in Rome to pollute and persecute the city with his tyrannical power and his phallic cult of the black stone. The suffering Christians beg God to release them from such agony, and on their insubordinate community falls the potential for rebirth from apocalyptic disintegration. The novel incarnates the disorders of end-of-century France in a figure who (disturbingly conjoining Woman and Man, East and West, Christianity and polytheism) is leading Rome to the abyss.³⁸

In contrast to the complex, communitarian trajectory of Lombard’s novel, Feuillade’s historical film appears to invite a reading in straightforwardly conservative terms as a call for the suppression of the feminine, the eradication of the foreign, and the regeneration of France as a combative Western power. Yet in his monumental study *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema 1896–1914* (2nd edition, 1994, 183), Richard Abel argues that the pre-feature, single-reel historical film genre of the period 1907 to 1911 “constituted a crucial site of contestation, not only

³⁷ See, for discussion of the place of imperial Rome in French discourses of national decline, Stephan 1974, 17–33; David 2001; David-de Palacio 2005, 332–3; Vance 1999, 110–11.

³⁸ Discussions of the allegorical qualities of Lombard’s novel include Birkett 1986, 15–18; David-de Palacio 2005, 183–229; Icks 2011, 164–9.

between the interests of spectacle attraction and narrative continuity, but also among the antagonistic social representations vying for ideological dominance in Third Republic France.”³⁹

Cinematic Pleasures and French Decadence

The emperor Elagabalus invites equivocation. Literary critics note that when Jean Lombard writes his condemnation of decadence in *L'agonie*, he revels paradoxically in the use of a decadent style of writing (David-de Palacio 2005, 210–11). Chapter 8 of book 1 is devoted to a description of the triumph in which the emperor parades his barbaric Asiatic cult through the center of Rome to the astonishment of a people already habituated to imperial excess:

Everyone could see him, a face vermillioned, eyebrows painted like those of an idol, a tall yellow tiara on fire with opals, amethysts, and chrysolites, a dress of trailing silk hatched with violent designs, the first that had ever been seen, the sleeves of which hung down heavy, leading in the hieratic manner of a god a float led by sixteen white horses where on an altar of precious stones rested, like a phallus, the Cone of black stone, round at its summit.⁴⁰

A pull-out color illustration by Auguste Leroux from the 38th edition of *L'agonie* (published by Ollendorff in 1902)⁴¹ does better, visual, justice to the spectacular exuberance of Lombard's depiction than the brief sample in literal English I offer above (Figure 10.5), and both operate in marked contrast to the images impressed on Elagabalus' own Roman coinage (Figure 10.2). The novel and this illustration of it deploy a clash between ordered and disordered styles—literary and graphic—to present Elagabalus' triumphal procession to readers as the victory of a voluptuous and frenzied Orient over the martial and monumental traditions of Rome. The chapter goes on at some length to catalogue the emperor's

³⁹ I am very grateful indeed to Richard Abel for taking the time to read through this chapter and offer some helpful comments.

⁴⁰ “Chacun le revoyait, la face vermillonnée, les sourcils peints comme ceux d'une idole, une haute tiara jaune incendiée d'opales, d'améthystes et de chrysolithes, une robe de soie trainante, tramée de dessins violents, la première qu'on eût vue, dont les manches lourdes pendaient, conduisant en l'attitude hiératique d'un dieu un char à seize chevaux blancs où sur un autel de pierreries reposait, tel qu'un phallus, le Cône de pierre noire, rond à son sommet.” Text from the 38th edition of 1902, published by P. Ollendorff, Paris, p. 54.

⁴¹ The edition and its illustrations by Auguste Leroux are accessible from the Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/lagoniel00lomb>.

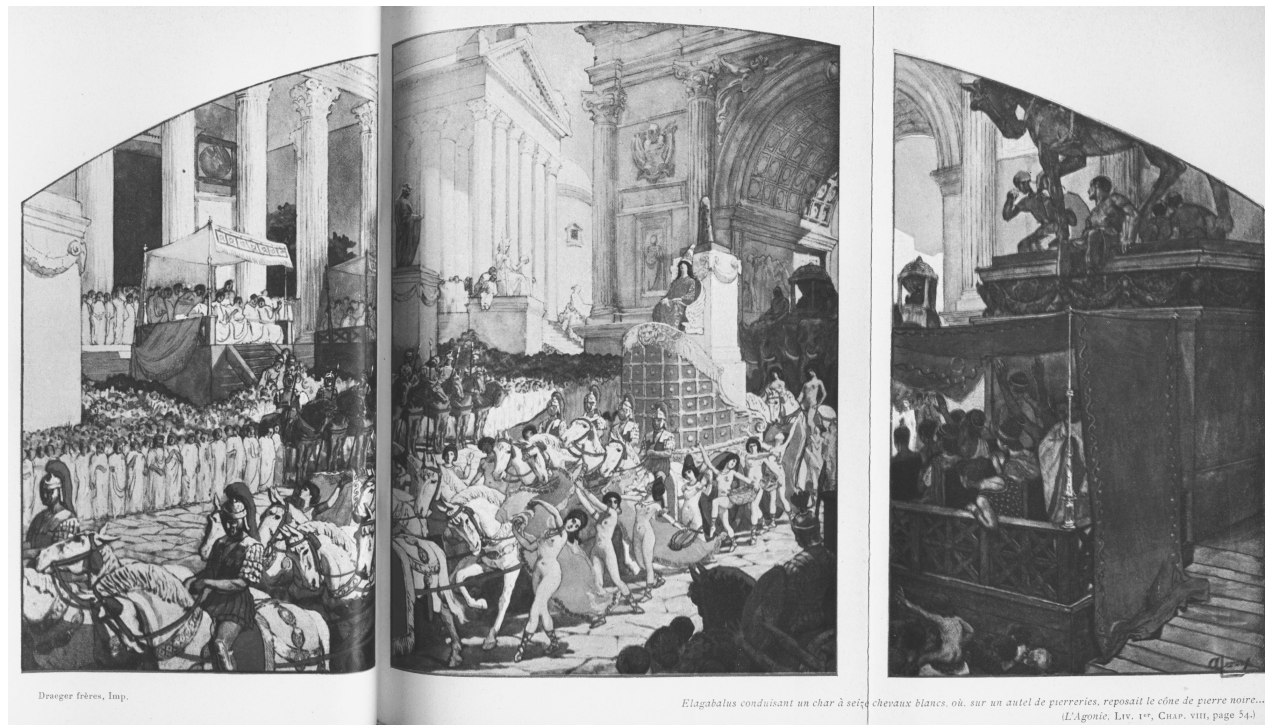


Figure 10.5 'Elagabalus leading a float of sixteen white horses, where on an altar of precious stones rested the cone of black stone . . .', (Elagabalus conduisant un char à seize chevaux blancs où sur un autel de pierreries reposait le cône de pierre noire . . .). Illustration by Auguste Leroux from Jean Lombard's *L'agonie*, 46th edition, c.1910, between pages 96 and 97. Paris: Librairie Ollendorff.

bizarrely assorted cortege. Those following behind include: naked Syrian dancers and priests of the Sun; a pell-mell of senators and consuls on foot singing hymns to the Principle of Life; elephants, leopards, and lions in chains; matrons exposing themselves obscenely; priests of Cybele and Pan; musicians and instruments of all kinds; a noisy unnamable multitude speaking every language. Those leading in front (and exposing the procession's contradictions) include: trumpeters, sacrificial animals, captives, lictors, and the entire Roman army. A parodic triumph then, not of courage and Roman *imperium* but of strangers and deviancy (David-de Palacio 2005, 363–8). This is decay at its most aesthetic.⁴²

The eruption between 1888 and 1911 of French literature concerning Elagabalus has been attributed to the tastes of the Decadent movement—the exploration of style over sin, the substitution of the degenerate for the conventional, the cultivation of artifice above all else. While political theorists as far back as Montesquieu had warned that the decadence of Rome had been a facet of its imperial collapse, novelists of the late nineteenth century celebrated it as that empire's greatest achievement and Elagabalus as its most sophisticated proponent.⁴³ The *Vita Heliogabali* was now mined for the features of Rome's finest, rather than its worst, emperor: the *princeps* who preferred aesthetics to the simple satisfaction of desire (Mader 2005, 151), who engaged in studied extravagance and theatrical debauchery, who incarnated “the archetypal aesthete and performer with a flawless sense of spectacle and inverted decorum” (Mader 2005, 163). The Decadents actively reconstructed Elagabalus as a mirror in which to admire themselves.⁴⁴ The French poet and novelist Baron Jacques d'Adelswärd-Fersen even behaved as, as well as wrote about, the emperor. In his novel *Black Masses. Lord Lyllian* (*Messes noires. Lord Lyllian*, 1905) he described the depravity of its English hero as like that of a modern Elagabalus, while the incitement of minors to debauchery with which the author was charged two years

⁴² On this and other aspects of Lombard's novel, see also Birkett 1986, 15–18; David-de Palacio 2005, 186–7, 208–14, and 363–8; Icks 2011, 164–9.

⁴³ For the interest of the Decadents in imperial Rome and Elagabalus in particular, see Stephan 1974, 17–33; Vance 1999, 113; de Palacio 2001, 117–18; David 2001, 7–12, 217–23, and 259–70; David-de Palacio 2005, 183–229; de Pasetti 2006; Icks 2011, 148–79; Dumenil 2012, 284–5.

⁴⁴ The immersion of the Decadents into the perspective of a debauched Elagabalus is discussed by Oswald 1949; Nugent 2008, 171; Icks 2011, 157–64.

earlier was said to have included the performance in his Parisian home of homoerotic masquerades set at the court of that emperor or of Nero (de Palacio 2001, 117–18).

Gaumont's director, Louis Feuillade, appears to have been familiar with the end-of-empire historical novels composed by Jean Lombard (a later historical drama Feuillade released in 1913, *L'agonie du Byzance*, dealt with failures of the Byzantine Empire as had Lombard's novel *Byzance* published in 1890). He might also have had the opportunity to watch *Héliogabale*, the spectacular lyric tragedy whose libretto (written by Émile Sicard) had been based on Lombard's novel and which was staged in Paris seven months before the release of *The Roman Orgy*. The musical themes composed by Déodat de Séverac comprised trumpet fanfare for the might of Rome, the Oriental scale for its collapse into insanity, and solemn Gregorian chants and uplifting hymns for Christianity's dawn (Waters 2008; Icks 2011, 132). Yet *The Roman Orgy* does not contain the charge of Christian persecution that had attached to Elagabalus in some of the moralizing narratives of the late nineteenth century. It does not even display the conical stone and the cult introduced to Rome of Syria's sun god. The film appears to owe less to the narrative drive of Lombard's novel than to the aesthetic exuberance of its depictions of imperial excess and to their colorful illustration in the novel's multiple editions. The emperor remains an amoral artist who, on screen, takes on the features of early cinema's showmen.

In fulfillment of the Gaumont manifesto for "*film esthétique*" published by Feuillade in 1910, 1911's *The Roman Orgy* exhibits a calculated address to the eye. Its pictorial ambition—Gaumont's attempt to realize "Beauty of Form"—is especially marked during the banquet scene where the emperor's guests are smothered by falling rose petals (Figure 10.4 above). Theme, composition, colorization, and species of flower all evoke a classical-subject painting by the Victorian academician Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *The Roses of Heliogabalus*, which had been exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1888 and made famous through its wide distribution as etchings (D'Hautcourt 2006, 118–20). In the painting, any critique of empire that might be expressed through the emperor's murderous diversion seems, ironically, to be overwhelmed by the celebration of its decadent splendor. A youthful Elagabalus resplendent in cloth of silk and gold, jewels and a diadem, reclining in his luxurious palace of dazzling surfaces (silver and mother of pearl, variegated marble, pink

rose petals) seeks, like the characters of Decadent fiction, to overcome his boredom through an extreme yet beautiful distraction.⁴⁵ In the film shot, elaborate stencil coloring creates a set of painterly effects: the bright jewel palette of the shimmering costumes (pale gold, dark pink, and pastel blue); the pointillism of the light pink petals (cf. D'Hautcourt 2006, 110). Furthermore, the film breaks the stasis of painting by dwelling on the movement of the petals as they fall and of the guests as they seek to escape the invading lions (D'Hautcourt 2006, 119). In this respect, the film lays claim to a specifically cinematic aesthetics of decadence.

Cinema's Roman Errors

The Roman Orgy further complicates any patriotic or educative reading of its representations of gender, Orientalism, and empire through the focus it places on how you *look* at Roman error. In the course of the film's eight short minutes, emphasis is persistently placed on spectacle and the act of looking upon perversity with pleasure. The emperor admires a senate of fashionable women, his feminized body parts, a boy's fatal mauling, a dance and a cascade of flowers disrupted by a pack of marauding lions, and the ensuing terror of his fleeing guests. Court favorites are embedded into the film as yet more spectators, complicitly expressing enjoyment in their emperor's entertainments. The triumph of visual fascination over moral indignation occurs in the film's concluding moments just when, significantly, the historical drama simultaneously breaks away from its dependency on the *Vita Heliogabali* (D'Hautcourt 2006, 110–11) and breaches the rules of self-censorship laid down by the Gaumont film company. After Elagabalus is caught in his boudoir by the praetorians, after he is murdered and decapitated outside the film's frame, for a fleeting moment his severed head appears on screen attached to the end of a spear (Figure 10.6). The spectacular momentum of *The Roman Orgy* invites the cinema audience at this point to look upon that

⁴⁵ For this reading of *The Roses of Heliogabalus*, I am indebted to the work of Barrow (1997–8). Prettejohn 2002 offers a different interpretation of the ironies in Alma-Tadema's classical-subject painting. A further evocation of history painting may be made in the final intertitle of the film, which identifies Elagabalus as the Sardanapalus of Rome—the Assyrian tyrant whose love of luxury and exotic death had been painted by Delacroix c.1827.



Figure 10.6 The severed head of the emperor is placed on the end of a spear, *The Roman Orgy* or *L'orgie romaine* (Gaumont, France, 1911, dir. Louis Feuillade). Still from Collection: EYE Filmmuseum, the Netherlands.

forbidden dismemberment with the eyes of a sadistic Elagabalus and, unlike the emperor, to escape punishment for it.

Feuillade's Roman emperor exhibits attractions (including his dismembered self) to his on-screen and off-screen audiences and directly solicits visual curiosity. He performs like the showmen who exhibited films in French fairgrounds and café-concerts in the earliest years of moving images, when filmmakers were less concerned with telling stories than showing a series of views (Gunning 1990). His lion acts are deprived of the solemnities of Christian martyrdom and its promise of spiritual renewal, and thus resemble the vulgar amusements of the circus which lay at cinema's origins and which historical dramas such as this were supposed to transcend. The emperor-showman embraces the highbrow and the lowbrow, historical fiction and circus shows, narrative continuity and spectacle attraction, moral uplift and profitable entertainment. At a time when French writers were debating "whether the cinema acts as a significant force of moral reform or as an immoral temptation"

(Abel 1994, 11), he presses on the limits of what bourgeois cinemagoers might tolerate. Like Saint Anthony, Elagabalus is an ingenious device for cinematic *mise-en-abyme*.

Classical reception studies has pursued with vigor Charles Martindale's query whether meaning "is always realized at the point of reception" (1993, 3). As a consequence of this investigation of the emperor Elagabalus in early French cinema, I would argue that meaning is not realized at a point but at an intersection—between current understandings of the historical record, the history of receptions, and the differentiation between them.

11

Psychic Life in the Eternal City

Julia Kristeva and the Narcissism of Rome

Richard Fletcher

In February 1958, Classicist Ernst Zinn delivered a talk in Tübingen, West Germany called “Words in Memory of Ovid,” in which he invoked Sigmund Freud’s 1930 essay *Civilization and its Discontents* (Zinn 1994, 260–1).¹ According to Zinn, Ovid offers an “optimistic assessment of both the material and spiritual culture of his own time,” in short, a “contentment in civilization” (*Behagen in der Kultur*), a phrase that was set to contrast with the title and focus of Freud’s essay, which can be more literally translated as *The Discontent in Civilization* (*Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*).² Zinn’s reference to Freud is part of his argument that Ovid’s valorization of Rome’s (and his own) idea of *cultus* contrasts with the pessimism and claims to *simplicitas* of the previous generation of authors (Sallust, Horace, Vergil). In his discussion of modern Ovidian reception, Theodore Ziolkowski notes that Zinn’s argument could be interpreted as part of his valorization of his own time and postwar West Germany.³

¹ For more recent responses to Zinn’s general argument, see Cole 2008, 168 n. 403, and Stärk 2005.

² Zinn 1994, 262, “optimistische Einschätzung sowohl der materiellen wie der geistigen Kultur seiner eigen zeit,” quoted in Cole 2008, 168 n. 403.

³ Zinn 1994, 259 points out the bimillennial anniversaries of the births of Vergil, Horace, and Augustus as 1930, 1935, and 1937.

“Zinn insists that Ovid incorporates an aspect of Latinity that since Plautus and Terence had lost its literary representatives, an aspect of elegance and urbanity that Germans of the past five decades, as a result of their own historical situation and overseriousness, had ignored” (Ziolkowski 2005, 154). Ziolkowski’s observation is made within a general discussion of how German scholars marked the bimillennial anniversary of Ovid’s birth (1957–8) and implies that scholars like Zinn felt an affinity with Ovid’s cultured urbanity at this time of West German optimism.⁴ But where does his appeal to Freud fit into this? Ziolkowski continues:

Zinn’s essay, thanks to its position as the first piece in the widely distributed essay-collection *Ovid* (1968)—and no doubt also his appeal to Sigmund Freud, which at the time in Germany was still unusual enough to be startling—received considerable attention and contributed to the general revaluation of Ovid.

(Ziolkowski 2005, 154)

Given that it was during this period that Herbert Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* (Marcuse 1955) was using Freud’s essay about social repression to call for individuals to lead lives of contentment, was Zinn’s Ovid part of a similar gesture, to move past Germany’s checkered past into the bright new world of late 1950s, U.S.-style consumerism?

As counterpoint to Zinn’s lecture, fast-forward some forty years to Frank Ankersmit’s comparison of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Gibbon’s *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (Ankersmit 2001).⁵ Ankersmit reads Ovid’s version of the tale of Narcissus (*Met.* 3.339–510) and its psychoanalytic counterpart, narcissism, as “an allegory of the problems occasioned by historical writing” (Ankersmit 2001, 110).⁶ First, he describes Rome’s narcissistic error as follows:

Augustus and his successors, precisely the best and most perceptive among his successors, looked into the spring of republican Rome and fell in love with the self-image that they discovered on the surface of its waters. Like Narcissus, Rome, in the successive persons of its most constructive emperors, was fascinated by its own image, and it was Rome’s love of itself that destined it to the same fate as Narcissus. (Ankersmit 2001, 111)

⁴ For a general overview of this period, with a particular focus on the role of the United States in West German economic and cultural recovery, see Junker 2004.

⁵ For an earlier, shorter version of this chapter, see Ankersmit 1999.

⁶ Although, for a helpful discussion of the distinction between Narcissus and narcissism, see Engels 2013.

Following Gibbon in singling out Julian the Apostate as the main guilty party, Ankersmit then transposes Rome's narcissistic error onto Gibbon the historian and then onto all historical writing: "This raises, of course, the interesting question of whether historians—and not only the Roman emperor assuming their role—are susceptible to the same kinds of Narcissistic delusions as these architects of Rome's downfall" (Ankersmit 2001, 113). Ankersmit, who acknowledges his own historical period as defined by a culture of narcissism, is sensitive to the replication of the narcissistic errors of Rome for the historian, not only Gibbon, but himself and his contemporaries.⁷ This doubling of errors (of ancient Rome and its reception) offers a warning to Zinn's oppositional reading of Ovid and his "contentment" with Augustan Roman culture compared to Freud's analysis of "discontent" with civilization in 1930.

Both of these readings of Ovid engage with psychoanalysis. Zinn makes the direct opposition to Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, while Ankersmit indirectly replicates the errors of Rome and its reception through the figure of Narcissus via a general psychoanalytic theory of narcissism. However, in both engagements with psychoanalysis, there is one glaring omission. In recent scholarship in classical reception studies, it has been Freud's striking analogy of the human psyche as the city of Rome that has held pride of place.⁸ Here is the core text of the analogy:

Now let us make the fantastic supposition that Rome were not a human dwelling-place, but a mental entity with just as long and varied a past history: that is, in which nothing once constructed had perished, and all the earlier stages of development had survived alongside the latest. This would mean that in Rome the palaces of the Caesars were still standing on the Palatine and the Septizonium of Septimius Severus was still towering to its old height; that the beautiful statues were still standing in the colonnade of the Castle of St. Angelo, as they were up to its siege by the Goths, and so on. But more still: where the Palazzo Caffarelli stands there would also be, without this being removed, the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, not merely in its latest form, moreover, as the Romans of the Caesars saw it, but also in its earliest shape, when it still wore an Etruscan design and was adorned with terra-cotta antifixae. Where the Coliseum stands now, we could at the same time admire Nero's Golden House; on the Piazza of the Pantheon we should find not only the Pantheon of today as bequeathed to us by Hadrian, but

⁷ For general accounts of political and cultural narcissism, see Lasch 1979 and Post 2014.

⁸ See Edwards 1996, 26–8; Armstrong 2005, 198; Oliensis 2009, 127–36; Staley 2013b.

on the same site also Agrippa's original edifice; indeed, the same ground would support the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva and the old temple over which it was built. And the observer would need merely to shift the focus of his eyes, perhaps, or change his position, in order to call up a view of either the one or the other. (Freud 1953, 6)

Freud's fantasy of the timeless, eternal city of Rome manifested as a topographical image plays a key role in his essay as it articulates the adult version of the infantile "sensation of eternity" or the "oceanic feeling." Yet in spite of the specific role it plays in his essay, Freud's analogy is also a compelling image for Classicists to cling to, one that articulates the nature of Rome's legacy in spatial terms of the Eternal City. In many ways this image proves Zinn's argument by further highlighting Freud's nostalgia for Rome from the perspective of 1930 as proof of Ovid's (and Zinn's, according to Ziolkowski) "contentment." At the same time, it would also prove Ankersmit's charge of the erroneous narcissism of the city and its emperors, looking back to their predecessors on the very same sites of the Eternal City to make their mark. But how can the same analogy work as nostalgia for Rome and proof of its narcissistic errors? In this essay, I claim that the root of this problem can be found within Freud's analogy itself, which both enacts nostalgia for ancient Rome and uncritically repeats Rome's narcissism at the same time. I argue further that Julia Kristeva, rather than repeat this error anew, found a way to correct it, both directly in her psychoanalytic writings and indirectly in her fictional work. As we shall see, Kristeva updates Freud's analogy for the contemporary "narcissistic city," and, in doing so, she represents an improvement, in my view, with respect to how psychoanalysis approaches the historical past and, perhaps, the human subject. For Kristeva, the pivotal figure in this updated Freudian psychoanalysis is indeed the Roman poet Ovid, both his tale of Narcissus in the *Metamorphoses* and its reception in his exile poetry. In her rereading of Freud with Ovid, Kristeva does nothing less than furnish a more acute model for classical reception studies insofar as she is able to use the figure of Narcissus in a deeply self-aware and self-critical fashion—as a model, in short, for the interpreter of the past faced at once with narcissistic attachment and the necessity of avoiding the totalizing fantasies with which it is implicated.

As a microcosm of the argument to come, let us consider a rare instance of connecting Ovid with Freud's analogy of Rome within

psychoanalytic criticism. I refer to a passing mention by Martha Reineke in her discussion of Kristeva's curious detective novel *The Old Man and the Wolves*.⁹ Reineke writes how Kristeva makes her character—the Classicist Septicius Clarus (the Old Man of the title)—echo Freud in how he promotes the reading of Classical texts—Ovid and Tibullus—to his students as a means of finding some “psychic space” amid the wreckage and hostility of the dystopian city of Santa Varvara:

Acknowledging that much of the earliest topographies of Rome are lost in rubble, Freud suggests that, if Rome were a psychical entity rather than a habitation in space, all layers of history could be held together at once . . . Septicius also has pointed to an ancient city's landscape to suggest the power of memory to counter violence that, on the macrocosmic level, is destroying Santa Varvara and, at the microcosmic level, is shattering the psyches of its residents. He has told his students that Tibullus and Ovid still may be found “in the original texts, of course; in the ruins of ancient palaces and churches” but also “in the thoughts of people. There are still traces of their old selves in them, in you.” (Reineke 2014, 232)

Here we find neither simply Zinn's opposition between Ovid's “contentment” and Freud's “discontent,” nor Ankersmit's Ovidian doubling of the errors of Rome with the errors of reception, but instead the therapeutic recourse to past models to create the future possibility of a nurturing psychic space out of a destructive and hostile present. Reineke highlights Kristeva's ambivalent approach to memory (both of others and within the self) that can evoke neither simply nostalgia for, nor error of, the past, but a model of reception that aims towards the future, by grafting the past onto the present.¹⁰ This grafting takes place at the level of Kristeva's radical remake of Freud's analogy, which, while still maintaining its focus on the memory of the ancient topography of the city, also projects the narcissistic city of the present with its illusory spectacles. Reineke notes of the imaginary city, Santa Varvara, where Kristeva's novel is set:

Its inhabitants are oblivious to actual experience and are lifted out of their blasé and bored lives only when they become excited by the illusory spectacles created by the media. Nothing lies beneath the fabricated surfaces of their lives . . . [the] monster-making violence in a city that has become oblivious to its ancient topography. (Reineke 2014, 233)

⁹ There is, however, a passing reference in Matzner 2011, 318–19 in his discussion of David Malouf's 1978 Ovidian novella *An Imaginary Life*.

¹⁰ On this idea of grafting, see Kristeva 1996, 169.

It is Kristeva's conflation of Freud's Rome with the picture of the narcissistic city that demands the question: what role, if any, does narcissism play in Freud's analogy of Rome and its reception?

Kristeva develops her own model of reception as grafting beyond nostalgia or error while still maintaining the focus on the city (of ancient Rome as well as the present and future metropolis as dystopia). Like Ankersmit, Kristeva locates this type of reception by using the figure of Ovid's Narcissus. As we shall see, it is the Ovidian figure of Narcissus who acts as the impetus for Kristeva to replace Freud's analogy between Rome and the human psyche with the idea of psychic life within an oppressive contemporary metropolis. As a psychoanalyst, however, Kristeva focuses on Narcissus not merely as the representative of erroneous self-love that Ankersmit identifies in Rome's history (and its reception). Instead, she is able to harness the ambivalence of Ovid's Narcissus as both seduced by his own image and also having knowledge of this seduction. When it comes to the narcissistic city of Rome, a similar experience is found in Ovid's exile poetry, which is hinted at by Kristeva's fiction. In *Ex Ponto* 1.8, Ovid writes back to Severus in Rome, not only to show his nostalgic longing for the urbanity of the city he has been deprived of, but also in knowledge of its limits in his future hope for a more pastoral space for him to develop. It is with this knowledge that Ovid encompasses, yet transcends, his own figure of Narcissus from the *Metamorphoses*, by being able to experience the seduction and danger of Rome to teach Severus how to live there himself. The Roman error of narcissism, in Freud's original formation and Kristeva's subtle correction, generates more than a simple debate over what constitutes "correct" or "incorrect" types of reception. Instead it warns against taking any psychoanalytic reception of antiquity as a totality by engaging with the sequence of debates about the human psyche that emerges from the transitions and developments at work *within* the psychoanalytic tradition. Furthermore, the specific sequence from Freud to Kristeva demands taking seriously Kristeva's complex range of work—both psychoanalytic and fictional. This, too, has considerable implications for Ovid and the reception of his poetry. Following Kristeva's lead, we see that the Roman poet represents not only a key stage in the development of the Narcissus myth for the psychoanalyst, but also the creation of a speculative world in his exile poetry for the writer of fiction.

Rewriting Freud's Rome

Before turning to Kristeva's direct engagement with Freud's Rome and with Ovid's Narcissus—and the relationship between them—I want to look at two different ways in which Freud's analogy of Rome has been read by Classicists and how their analyses uncover traces of narcissism already at work in Freud's text. An implication of this part of my argument is that Kristeva's and Classicists' readings of Freud's Rome are not so different, and that they are united by a psychoanalytically informed mode of reading the Rome analogy that paves the way for the idea of ancient Rome as a "narcissistic city." While Classicists keep the Eternal City center stage and their arguments only allude to narcissism, Kristeva replaces Rome with the contemporary metropolis, but tackles narcissism and Narcissus head on.

Catharine Edwards quotes Freud's analogy to open her first chapter of her book *Writing Rome*, called "The city of memories," by comparing it to the engravings of Piranesi (Edwards 1996, 27–8). Edwards relishes the complexity of Freud's depiction of the strata of Rome's history and reflects on how Freud displays his "mastery" of the ancient city through the work of "imagination and erudition."¹¹ For the remainder of the chapter, Edwards shows how Roman authors preempted Freud by responding to their city's past in a "synchronous, permanent present" (Edwards 1996, 28). While this is the most substantial treatment of the analogy in *Writing Rome*, earlier in her book, Edwards remarks on Freud's "ambivalent desire for Rome," comparing him with other figures who had been captivated by the Eternal City (e.g. Byron) (Edwards 1996, 16). This desire stems from what has been called Freud's "Rome neurosis" and which David Staley has called "Freud's own fantasy, one in which the city represented complex personal and cultural aspirations" (Staley 2013b, 118). Yet as Freud is just one among many captivated by Rome, it is the focus on the topographical imagination of ancient and modern authors that is the main focus of Edwards's study and not the particular case of Freud. Nonetheless, by noting this "ambivalent desire for Rome," Edwards prefigures the ambivalence of narcissism in its seductive but dangerous capacity. Furthermore, such ambivalence is found in Freud's letters that recount his visit to the Eternal City. For example, in a letter to Fliess

¹¹ Edwards 1996, 28.

shortly after returning from Rome in 1901, Freud acknowledges his preference for “ancient Rome undisturbed,” and admits to being “disturbed” himself by the meaning of the medieval city.¹² When read with the later fantastical topography of Rome in *Civilization and its Discontents*, this privileging of the ancient city is apparent. Consider the final monument in Freud’s analogy: “Indeed, the same ground would support the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva and the old temple over which it was built.” The rhetorical emphasis, both here and elsewhere, falls upon the earlier building, which comes second in each instance, rather than the later one, which comes first, and is in this case explicitly a medieval structure. Ankersmit, we may recall, would find Freud guilty of the Roman error of privileging the earlier ancient city.

In contrast to Edwards, Oliensis’s focus on Freud’s Rome comes at the end of her book wholly dedicated to a discussion of Freudian psychoanalysis and Latin poetry. Given her different focus, Oliensis is more interested in how and why Freud uses Rome as an analogy, rather than in finding parallels for her reading of Latin authors. Vital to Oliensis’s reading is Freud’s own acknowledgment that the analogy fails: “The strangest thing about this amazing palimpsest is that Freud immediately proceeds to drain off its significance” (Oliensis 2009, 134). Freud explains that the analogy is limited because the psyche is much richer than the Roman city it is compared to, and pronounces that a priori no city can represent the human psyche because, while destructions are part and parcel of a city’s life, any comparable destruction of the mind from trauma or inflammation puts the coherence of the psyche in serious jeopardy. If so, it is destroyed in a way that would only compare with the total destruction of the city; if not, then unlike the city, the mind will undergo no comparable periodic destructions. Taking the lead from this question of destruction, Oliensis proceeds to make a vital connection between the analogy and the psychic development of the infant: “Rome may be a prime specimen of a complex civilization, but it also and simultaneously embodies the imperious desire to reabsorb the world the infant had perforce to let go” (Oliensis 2009, 135).

¹² Freud 1954, 335–6. For a general discussion of this passage and its connection with the “Rome neurosis,” see Schorske 1991.

Oliensis's reference to the infant's "imperious desire," like Edwards's passing statement of Freud's "ambivalent desire," contains a nod to narcissism. This time, however, it is in the role of narcissism in the formation of the ego and not, as with Edwards, the projection onto the external world. To support this reading Oliensis quotes Leo Bersani's account of the relationship between the footnotes and the main text of Freud's essay. This realignment of Freud's essay shows that "civilization . . . is merely a cultural metaphor for the psychic fulfilment in each of us of a narcissistically thrilling wish to destroy the world" (Bersani 1986, 23). Oliensis's Rome embodies the "imperious desire" that in turn transposes Bersani's "narcissistically thrilling wish" of civilization. She responds by announcing that "the oceanic feeling resurfaces as the sensation of Roman imperialism" (Oliensis 2009, 135). By invoking the *Aeneid* and the ambiguous duality of the cruelty of Jupiter and Juno, Oliensis concludes her book as follows (echoing Walter Benjamin's famous maxim):

This is not a civilized critique of a civilization that has devolved into barbarity, but a redescription of civilization as aggression, at once overt and disavowed. Thus Virgil's version of *Civilization and its Discontents* sets squarely before our eyes, in plain sight, though constantly sliding out of focus, the imperial problematic that Freud could not bring himself quite to write out of his *Aeneid*.

(Oliensis 2009, 136)¹³

Yet what is missing from Oliensis's redirection of Bersani's interpretation of *Civilization and its Discontents* is the explicit location of this destructive impulse in narcissism.

When discussing the "oceanic feeling," Freud makes the following observation:

From pathology we have come to know a large number of states in which the boundary line between ego and outer world become uncertain or in which they are actually incorrectly perceived—cases in which parts of a man's own body, even component parts of his own mind, perceptions, thoughts, feelings, appear to him alien and not belonging to himself; *other cases in which a man ascribes*

¹³ Oliensis argues that Freud's choice of epigraph for *The Interpretation of Dreams* (*flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo*, *Aen.* 7. 312) aligns him with Juno and not *pious* Aeneas, as part of his associations with the Semitic figure of Hannibal in seeing Rome as "always shrouded in ambivalence" (Oliensis 2009, 129).

to the external world things that clearly originate in himself, and that ought to be acknowledged by him. So the ego's cognizance of itself is subject to disturbance, and the boundaries between it and the outer world are not immovable.

(Freud 1953, 3; my emphasis)

What this quotation shows is that to locate narcissism in *Civilization and its Discontents* is to understand the expanded analogy of human history as akin to the full developmental history of a person—whether Freud himself or the infant in general. The primitive stage of primary narcissism is that in which fantasy is in full control, and when the totality of human power is not questioned. The next, religious, stage transfers this total power (at least in part) to the gods. Then, with the scientific stage, the fantasy of total power is either abandoned (as an infantile illusion) or reawakened as a misguided trust in cultural acquisition. It is in this latter stage that Freud returns to the idea of “striving to become one's own ideal” and with it the concept of narcissism.

Edwards's and Oliensis's discussions of Freud's Rome do different work according to the demands of their main interests. However, with their references to “ambivalent” and “imperious” desire, of Freud and the infant respectively, both show traces of the psychoanalytic concept of narcissism in their response to Freud's analogy. In the next section, we will see how Julia Kristeva, unlike Edwards and Oliensis, removes all trace of the ancient city of Rome in her own picture of the state of the psyche. However, what remains of the Classicists' latent recourse to narcissism in their arguments is Kristeva's more fully engaged discussion of this psychoanalytic concept, through a focus on the figure of Narcissus and his story as synonymous with the errors of the narcissistic city of Rome.

Kristeva's Narcissistic City

Freud's Rome analogy appears in Andrew Ballantyne's anthology *Architecture Theory: A Reader in Philosophy and Culture* under the section on the “Individual.” It is grouped together with the following text by Julia Kristeva:

I am picturing a sprawling metropolis with glass and steel buildings that reach to the sky, reflect it, reflect each other, and reflect you—a city filled with people steeped in their own image who rush about with overdone make-up on and who

are cloaked in gold, pearls and fine leather, while in the next street over, heaps of filth abound and drugs accompany the sleep or the fury of the social outcasts. This city could be New York; it could be any future metropolis, even your own. What might one do in such a city? Nothing but buy and sell goods and images, which amounts to the same thing, since they both are dull, shallow symbols. Those who can or wish to preserve a lifestyle that downplays opulence as well as misery will need to create a space for an “inner zone”—a secret garden, an intimate quarter, or simply and ambitiously, a psychic life. (Kristeva 1995, 27)

In this remarkable text, Kristeva transforms the historical focus of Freud’s Rome analogy into a picture of a series of simultaneous contemporary reflections. Furthermore, as if reacting to Freud’s own acknowledgment of the failure of his analogy, instead of making the city an analogy for the psyche, she makes the idea of “psychic life” a contingent aspect of what living in such a city would mean. It is as if she has taken on board Freud’s reservations and not only abandoned Rome, but also the totalizing and imperious ambitions of analogy itself. Ballantyne notes that while Freud’s analogy of Rome was a limited model for the psyche, Kristeva’s picture “suggests the idea of a rapport between modern mental health and the kind of city that we as a society make ourselves live in” (Ballantyne 2005, 120). But to understand why Kristeva transforms and updates Freud’s analogy in this way, we need to look at the context of this passage in her book *New Maladies of the Soul*.

Kristeva’s remake of Freud’s Rome analogy comes in the second chapter of the book, called “In Times Like These, Who Needs Psychoanalysis?” Before this point in the book, Kristeva has diagnosed the life of “modern man” in the society of the spectacle as necessarily narcissistic.¹⁴ In the opening sentence of the book she articulates the basic contrast between past accounts of the soul and her questions about its existence in the current age:

Do you have a soul? This question, which may be philosophical, theological, or simply misguided in nature, has a particular relevance for our time. In the wake of psychiatric medicines, aerobics, and media zapping, does the soul still exist?

(Kristeva 1995, 3)

¹⁴ Elsewhere Kristeva notes that “this empire of the spectacle, when linked to other social problems, leads to what I have called ‘new maladies of the soul’” (quoted in Lechte 2005, 117). Lechte 2009 also treats Kristeva’s move from the specular to the spectacle.

This sentence is prefaced by an opening epigraph from Democritus (“It is more important that men create the logos of the soul than of the body”) and she proceeds to bring her title “maladies of the soul” back to philosophical and medical texts of antiquity that cut through the body/soul dualism. Kristeva’s aim is also to diagnose her contemporary moment as lacking the space to create a psychic life and projecting the psychoanalytic “clinic” as the place for some kind of cure for the malaise:

We have neither the time nor the space needed to create a soul for ourselves, and the mere hint of such activity seems frivolous and ill-advised. Held back by his aloofness, modern man is a narcissist—a narcissist who may suffer, but who feels no remorse. He manifests his suffering in his body, and he is inflicted with somatic symptoms . . . (Kristeva 1995, 6)

Through the modern narcissist, Kristeva demands that Freud and Lacan need to be reconsidered. At the same time, we find that their models of the psyche as grounded in antiquity also demand a reconsideration of antiquity. Kristeva’s picture of the narcissistic city is, however, not merely targeting this contemporary culture of narcissism. As the recurring figure of ancient treatments of her topic intimate, she will also return to antiquity to explore the genealogy of the narcissism she has diagnosed surrounding us. Ultimately this genealogy includes the figure of Narcissus in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, although in this text this reference is clouded in the following obscure paragraph:

Yet that is where the story gets complicated. The West has been crafting this inner life since the beginning of the Christian era, when Plotinus transformed a Janus-faced Narcissus into two hands joined in prayer. Inner life has been reinforced by the spiritual path and carnival of the Middle Ages, and it has been shaped by Montaigne’s fragile ego, Diderot’s passions, and the meditations of Hegel and Kant. It has since become a psychic drama, a psychodrama. Plotinus has degenerated into . . . Dallas. Indeed, the residents of this steel city are not in want of inner drama—in fact, they are as anxious, depressed, neurotic, and psychotic as the Freudian unconscious would wish them to be. (Kristeva 1995, 27)

Here Kristeva offers her own archaeology, not of the topography of Rome, but of an intellectual idea. This idea builds on a specific moment of transformation—of the Janus-faced Narcissus by the Neoplatonic philosopher Plotinus (*Enneads* 1.6.8.8). But what does all this mean? And what has Ovid’s Narcissus got to do with it?

Ovid's Narcissus in Rome

"Can we imagine," asks Hubert Damisch, "the fable of Narcissus taking place in an urban context?" (Damisch 2001, 19).¹⁵ To understand the role that Ovid's Narcissus plays in Kristeva's picture of the modern narcissistic city, we must trace our steps back to an earlier work: *Tales of Love*. In the section called "Narcissus: The New Insanity," Kristeva writes, "Only at the beginning of the Christian era did the fable of Narcissus enter the domain of literature. We owe our first *complete* variant to Ovid" (Kristeva 1987, 103). After a very brief analysis of Ovid's Narcissus, Kristeva introduces the version of the myth found in Plotinus. However, to understand what work the juxtaposition of the Augustan poet and Neoplatonic philosopher is doing for Kristeva, we need to consider how Narcissus functions in her argument in *Tales of Love* more generally.

Let us first note, in this connection, the general absence of Plotinus in studies of Narcissus in Rome and the psychoanalytic tradition. Like Freud's Rome analogy, Ovid's Narcissus has been a key point of contact between psychoanalysis and ancient Rome, either through dealing with Ovid's text in a direct encounter with psychoanalysis, or mediated through Kristeva's analysis in *Tales of Love*.¹⁶ However, in neither case is Plotinus' Narcissus part of the discussion. For example, in the former he is relegated to a list of other authors that engaged directly or indirectly with the Narcissus myth—alongside Conon, Pausanias, and Philostratus.¹⁷ This omission of Plotinus' counterpart to Ovid's Narcissus misses a trick, however, when it comes to the significance of the reception of Narcissus in the psychoanalytic tradition, especially in its Kristevan manifestation. To explain this, we need to contextualize Kristeva's discussion of Narcissus within the framework of the earlier chapters of *Tales of Love*.

After a series of autobiographical musings on the theme of the work ("In Praise of Love"), Kristeva's first main section, called "Freud and Love: Treatment and its Discontents," begins abruptly with evoking both Freud and Narcissus in the same sentence: "In his journey through the

¹⁵ Damisch's book had a major impact on my thinking about the conception of the narcissistic city of Kristeva, somewhere between ancient Rome and the United States.

¹⁶ For the former, see Hardie 2002; for the latter, Janan 2007.

¹⁷ See, for example, Bartsch 2006, 85 n. 86.

land of love Freud reaches Narcissus only after having travelled over the dissociated space of hysteria" (Kristeva 1987, 21). What Kristeva is alluding to here is how the Freudian concept of identification in the formation of the Ego takes two main forms: "hysterical identification" and "narcissistic identification." While Freud will distinguish between these different modes of identification (e.g. in "Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego," 1921), Kristeva's comment targets the fact that Freud's first use of the term "identification" was to describe "hysterical identification" in 1897, when he wrote about "the identification that occurs" in connection with the illness or death of one's parents, and the response "to punish oneself in a hysterical fashion . . . with the same states [of illness] that they have had." But in spite of being named *first* by Freud, and later called "incorporation" by others, on later analysis it is in fact narcissistic identification that *precedes* hysterical identification in the formation of the Ego. (This is later called introjection.) Now, elsewhere in the chapter, Kristeva will tackle these forms of identificatory processes and their relationship as follows:

The notional slippage that takes place between the "incorporation" of an object, or even its "introjection," and an *Identifizierung* [Identification] that is not on the level of "having" but locates itself at once on that of "being-like." On what ground, within what material does having switch over to being? (Kristeva 1987, 25)

It is this "slippage" within processes of identification, between *having* and *being*, that could be dubbed "the Kristevan slip."¹⁸ This is not only because for Kristeva this slippage is particularly bound up with language, but also because it is precisely the slippage that takes place between the figures of Narcissus in Ovid and Plotinus. But before we get to these figures, let us consider the next chapter of *Tales of Love* called "Manic Eros, Sublime Eros: On Male Sexuality." In a discussion of the Platonic dialogues about Eros, Kristeva notes how:

Far from any deceit, Plato speaks to us, over the heads of his commentators, in harmony with the anxieties that fill modern cities. He is situated, in the fourth century B.C., as on a rooftop with slopes descending on either side. One opens out on manic, painful, exorbitant possession, on black masses of shameful

¹⁸ This was the original focus of my paper delivered at the conference in Michigan, which also focused on ideas of *eros* and the Roman philosopher.

nights and bodies deriving pleasure from being ridiculed. The other leads to superhuman effort (he calls it supercelestial) on the part of the soul which, within the same phallic dynamics, tears itself away from the allurements of *having* to accede to the dignity of *knowing* and *being*. (Kristeva 1987, 68)

Here “the Kristevan slip” of Freudian psychoanalysis, between types of identification, is found pre-made in Plato’s *Phaedrus*. And it is from this Platonic peak that Kristeva looks out to Plotinus to what she will call a “mini-revolution” in our conceptions of love:

We shall see later on how, through neo-Platonic thought, an ascending erotics became internalized, how it took on the violence of mania and made inner space the reflection of an alter-ego, an idealized Ego, sustained by a new myth, that of Narcissus. Thus, thanks to love, would salvation be assured. The feathered Platonic soul gave way to the Plotinian soul bearing a narcissistic mirror.

(Kristeva 1987, 59)

But where is Ovid in all of this? Can he be merely bypassed so as to match up Platonic Eros with that of the Neoplatonist Plotinus? For Kristeva this is not possible since it is Ovid’s Narcissus that acts as what she dubs “the new insanity” which demands the transformation from “Platonic ideality into speculative internality” (Kristeva 1987, 115). Ovid’s Narcissus is insane because he does not perceive that the other whom he wants to merge with is his own self, and inasmuch, there is no object. In a wonderfully self-referential move, Kristeva puts Ovid outside his own text, as he looks on at Narcissus:

We are here confronted with what we can but call the vertigo of a love with no object other than a mirage. Ovid marvels, fascinated and terrified, at the sight of a nonobject [i.e the pool & his reflection in it], simple product of the eye’s mistake; on the other, there is the power of the image. “What you seek is nowhere.”

(Kristeva 1987, 104)

In fact, as Kristeva notes: “The object of [Ovid’s] Narcissus is psychic space; it is representation itself, fantasy. But he does not know it, and he dies. If he knew it he would be an intellectual, a creator of speculative fictions, an artist, writer, psychologist or psychoanalyst. He would be Plotinus or Freud” (Kristeva 1987, 116). Now we can finally see the work that both “Ovid” and “Narcissus” are doing for Kristeva. The Kristevan slip from *having* to *being* takes place at the level of her own analysis in that there is a division between the myth, the figure, and the character of Narcissus in Ovid, and the roles of “creator” for Plotinus and Freud. But

Ovid plays another role in this dynamic. What unites Plotinus and Freud is their role as creators of speculative fictions, but what Kristeva portrays Plotinus, at least, reacting to is a figure in a literary text. Charles Shepherdson has argued that Kristeva's Narcissus and the combination of Plotinus and Ovid enacts a dynamic between philosophy and literature, citing the following passage of Kristeva's analysis: "The *reflection* of which Narcissus became enamoured and which led him to his death became the fundamental *topos* of a thought that parted with ancient philosophy to nourish speculative thinking" (Kristeva 1987, 105).¹⁹ Shepherdson's reading here follows Kristeva in seeing Ovid's literary Narcissus as ultimately corrected by Plotinus' philosophical Narcissus. But in a move that is not found in Kristeva, he intimates that Ovid's Narcissus enacted a break with the Platonic erotic tradition and became the impetus to an ostensibly nonphilosophical tradition of speculative thinking. For Kristeva, "Narcissus is compensated for by the genius of speculative thought, starting with Plotinus and up to the Fathers of the Church who rehabilitate the narcissian concern for one's own proper space, beyond the condemnation of the narcissistic error" (Kristeva 1987, 376). She then, in a move that preempts the picture of the narcissistic city in *New Maladies of the Soul*, sees this tradition that begins with Plotinus as one that is accompanied by the change in ancient society from the *polis* to the *oikoumene*: "Torn away from the Ancient city-state (*polis*) now falling apart, thrown into the civilized world (*oikoumene*)—for which the present-day equivalent would be advanced mass-mediaticization—man, seized by an unnamable solitude, was called upon to withdraw into himself and discover himself as a psychic being" (Kristeva 1987, 376). It is this *oikoumene* that is the direct predecessor of our contemporary condition. However, in light of Shepherdson's revision of Kristeva's text and his view of the transition back to Ovid, we are compelled to ask: does Ovid offer a vision of the narcissistic city in his poetry? My claim is that he does. This comes to light, I argue, through a reading of Kristeva's detective novel *The Old Man and the Wolves*, with its revision of Ovid's exilic home of Tomis into the allegorical, narcissistic city of Santa Varvara, home of the Old Man, Ovid-loving Classicist Septicius Clarus.

¹⁹ Cited by Shepherdson 2008, 102.

To Rome, from Santa Varvara aka Tomis

Reading Kristeva's fictional output has only recently been acknowledged as vital for understanding her critical work. For example, in discussing Kristeva's interest in the idea of the society of the spectacle (following Debord), Keltner claims that:

While the term spectacle appears frequently within Kristeva's critical works beginning in the early 1990s, she nowhere offers the sustained philosophical attention that she gives to other technical concepts in her oeuvre. Yet, it is the lead antagonist in her fictional works. Consistent with her search for intimate revolts in the society of the spectacle, Kristeva's detective fiction seeks to concretely enact an inquiry and experience of the spectacles' transformation.

(Keltner 2011, 132)

In fact, the picture of the narcissistic city from *New Maladies of the Soul* also appears in her works of fiction. Keltner makes the direct comparison between the imagined metropolis and the allegorical city of Santa Varvara ("Barbarian" in Russian) that appears as a setting in *The Old Man and the Wolves*, *Possessions*, and *Murder in Byzantium*.²⁰ While Santa Varvara has been read as a hidden reference to Kristeva's native country of Bulgaria, it could also be "the spectacular global city as all cities and all spaces in between" (Keltner 2011, 133).²¹

In Ziolkowski's brief analysis of *The Old Man and the Wolves*, he makes the association between Kristeva and Ovid as follows:

Kristeva was born in 1941 in eastern Bulgaria, not far from Ovid's place of exile... Her allegorical work is located in a country called Santa Barbara... which sounds very much like the Bulgaria where the semiotician and feminist theoretician was born and educated... The Balkan setting is appropriate because the Old Man is also Ovid in exile. (Ziolkowski 2005, 141–2)

Ziolkowski proceeds to quote the clearest proof of the comparison:

What century was it? Was he in the first century, in exile on the shores of the Black Sea, dreaming of the metamorphoses that took place in human beings as they entered upon a new era, a new age just as steeped in brutishness as the old?

²⁰ In Kristeva's original French the city is called "Santa Barbara" which, in her discussion of *Possessions*, Ryan reads as "an echo of the Californian town" (Ryan 2014, 90–1). For further reflections on this strange city, caught between East and West, the past and the future, see the essays in Trigo 2013.

²¹ On the Bulgarian connection, see Nikolchina 2013, 149–50.

Or was he in the present, in Santa Varvara, where a Bogeyman would soon come to disconnect the artificial lung that was still keeping the Ovid-haunted ancient alive? (Kristeva 1993)²²

If Santa Varvara represents both Kristeva's picture of the narcissistic city and the site of Ovid's exile, there are some fundamental implications for Ovid's own poetry. While the *Metamorphoses* is a key text for *The Old Man and the Wolves*—it is used as the novel's epigraph and for the consistent theme of metamorphosis, especially of the myth of Lycaon and the ominous wolves—the context of Ovid's exile poetry for Kristeva's Santa Varvara is also significant. The implicit connection between the *Metamorphoses* and Ovid's exile poetry in the figure of the Old Man brings with it the question of how Ovid's Narcissus may be found, in some form, in his later work. The key to this connection is the role of the city itself. If Santa Varvara is the "narcissistic city" for Kristeva's Old Man, then this has implications for Ovid's presentation of (and nostalgia for) Rome from his position as exile. In what follows, I will read one of Ovid's poems from exile with these ideas in mind, so as to show specifically how Rome does indeed play the role of narcissistic city for the exiled poet.

When Ovid laments to his friend Cornelius Severus about his exile in hostile Tomis in *Ex Ponto* 1.8, especially the precarious position of this warring outpost of the Roman Empire, he denies that his complaint is merely about being robbed of the comforts of city life (*urbanae commoda uitae*, 1.8.29). In doing so he lists some of his old haunts:²³

atque domo rursus pulchrae loca uertor ad urbis
cunctaque mens oculis peruidet illa suis.
Nunc fora, nunc aedes, nunc marmore tecta theatra,
nunc subit aequata porticus omnis humo,
gramina nunc Campi pulchros spectantis in hortos
stagnaque et euripi Virgineusque liquor.
At, puto, sic Urbis misero est erepta uoluptas,
quolibet ut saltem rure frui liceat!

(Ovid, *Ex Ponto* 1.8.33–40)

²² This section is quoted, in his own translation, by Ziolkowski 2005, 142.

²³ All translations of Ovid are my own.

And, from my home, I return to the sites of the lovely city,
 and I survey it all with my mind's-eye mind.
 Now the *fora*, now the temples, now the marbled-roofed theaters,
 now I think of each portico with its leveled grounds.
 Now the grasses of the Campus that look onto the lovely gardens,
 the ponds and the canals, and the Aqua Virgo.
 But, I think, the pleasures of the city being snatched away
 in my misery, that I should at least enjoy all this countryside!

True, Ovid longs for Rome—from the *fora* and *porticus* to the Campus Martius—but in writing to Severus it is the calm of the surrounding rural landscape that evades him. All he wishes for in Tomis is a modest plot of land to cultivate during his exile (*hic saltem profugo glaeba colenda mihi*, 1.8.50). This image of the city-slicker Ovid longing for a modest plot of land in exile is ironic, especially given his “contentment” in civilization elsewhere in his exile poetry and the *Ars amatoria*, as discussed by Zinn. However, later in the poem, Ovid reuses the alternation between city and country to offer his projection of Severus’ existence back in Rome, and imagines his friend addressing an invitation for Ovid to return to Rome as his guest:

Te modo Campus habet, densa modo porticus umbra,
 nunc in quo ponis tempora rara forum;
 Vmbria nunc reuocat nec non Albana petentem
 Appia feruenti ducit in arua rota.
 Forsitan hic optes ut iustam subprimat iram
 Caesar et hospitium sit tua uilla meum.

(Ovid, *Ex Ponto* 1.8.65–70)

Now the Campus holds you, now a colonnade’s dense shade,
 now the Forum to which you devote precious little time.
 Now Umbria calls you back, and the Appian Way
 leads you to your Alban estate on flashing wheels.
 Here perhaps you wish that Caesar might temper
 His righteous anger, and your villa entertain me as a guest.

We find that the very same places Ovid longs for in Rome (*fora*, 1.8.35, *porticus*, 1.8.36, *gramina* . . . *Campus*, 1.8.37) are those frequented by Severus in reverse order (*Campus*, 1.8.65, *porticus*, 1.8.65, *forum*, 1.8.66).²⁴ The difference, however, is that Severus’ Rome and country seat literally intervene

²⁴ See Gaertner 2005, 464 on two of the three, although with no discussion of the order.

in his life, as self and environment are in harmony. While Ovid's Rome is described as "fine" (*pulchra*) and generates "pleasure" (*voluptas*), with the three places also mentioned in *Ars amatoria* as sites of erotic meeting, there is something that Ovid longs for in Severus' Rome that is missing from his own memories. With its dense shade and less-frequented Roman Forum, Severus' city seems to take heed of Ovid's rustic imaginary produced from exile. In other words, it may not be the city but how you look at and inhabit it that can cause relief. Perhaps Ovid's error in *Ars amatoria*—for which he is paying in *Ex Ponto*—is this inability to see this other side of Rome.

The way that *Ex Ponto* 1.8 offers a corrective image of Rome in Ovid's juxtaposition between his recollections of the city with Severus' present context, demands a re-evaluation of Rome's "fineness" and "pleasure." This awareness of the limits of Rome's seductions seems to compromise her role as a narcissistic city. Writing about *Ex Ponto* 4.4, in which he imagines a triumphal procession in his absence, Philip Hardie notes:

There is a curious anti-Narcissus effect when the exiled poet is brought to an awareness of the vacuity of a vivid vision of a consular inauguration back in Rome conjured by the goddess *Fama*, at the moment when he realizes that he himself is not to be seen in the crowd. Narcissus had been brought to his senses when he realized that he himself was the object of his futile gaze. (Hardie 2012, 173)

In *Ex Ponto* 1.8, it is Ovid's flight of the mind that sees the cityscape of Rome, which is brought down to earth by Severus' day-to-day interactions with the city. Furthermore, with the futile imagined invitation to Severus' villa we see a comparable moment of realization. With this poem, Ovid seems to recognize not only Rome as a narcissistic city, but his own role as Narcissus. Yet unlike the doomed youth of mythology, Ovid is somehow able to bring his realization of his Roman fantasy to bear on not only his own situation, but also that of Severus. In short, Ovid is able to discover and promote the "garden" for the cultivation of his psychic life, even in exile.

Conclusion: Kristeva's *carmen et error*

Reading Ovid's exile poetry in this way, we can appreciate how Zinn may have been right to focus on Ovid's glorification of Rome as a sophisticated civilization and to use Freud's depressing view of civilization in marked contrast. Yet Ankersmit, we find, was also accurate in using

Ovid's Narcissus to make a claim for the confluence of the narcissistic errors of Roman emperors and the reception of Rome, which in turn makes Ovid (and his readers) complicit in such errors. By turning, however, to Freud's analogy and its reception—both in Edwards's and Oliensis's studies of Latin poetry and Kristeva's critical and fictional writings—we have also seen how the positions of Zinn and Ankersmit can be reconciled through a focus on the ambivalent pleasures and dangers of narcissism. In other words, the same analogy can work as nostalgia for Rome and proof of its error. My analysis of Ovid's poem to Severus from exile confirms that Ovid generates this ambivalence through his attitude toward Rome, not only as a narcissistic city, but also as one in which Severus must find his own psychic space. Ovid becomes a knowing Narcissus in the process, in both being seduced by his own projection of Rome, and at the same time recognizing the deception in all its pleasures and dangers so as to better offer Severus advice.

Yet this has been Kristeva's picture all along. In tracing the narcissistic city of *New Maladies of the Soul* to the genealogy of Narcissus' narcissism in *Tales of Love* and to Septimius' Santa Vavara in *The Old Man and the Wolves*, we have encountered a compelling Janus-faced model for classical reception studies. It is a model that looks both to the past and to the future through a grafting of Ovid's Rome that is deeply embedded in a psychoanalytic tradition and pays homage to the creative and artistic demands of literature: in short, the Ovidian world of speculative fiction. Within this world the idea of *error*—whether the transgressions of Rome or its reception—is closely bound up with its means of articulation: its *carmen*. And key to this realization is an engagement with the sequence of debates about the human psyche that emerges from the transitions and developments at work *within* the psychoanalytic tradition. We are warned against the error of taking any psychoanalytic reception of antiquity as a totality, rather than as a body of concepts and practice whose development remains ongoing. Similarly, Kristeva's work cannot be mined for what it has to say about Ovid, Narcissus, or antiquity in general: we have to discover through living with it what these figures mean within its world.²⁵

²⁵ My thanks to Basil Dufallo for his invitation to the initial conference and for his careful and encouraging comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Thanks also to Dr. Shielagh Curie Finlay, my mother and a Jungian analyst (recently retired), for discussing narcissism with me and for everything else she has taught me.

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